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[“I WILL NOT LISTEN TO A WORD AGAINST HER!” CRIED ROGER, JUMPING TO HIS FEET, AND BOILING WITH PASSION.]

WITHOUT A REFERENCE.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS PLUMMER had not been twenty-four hours at sea, had barely passed “Gozo,” when she assumed her old manner, and impressed Sara once more as companion and confidante.

She told her of all her doings and sayings and her friends’ sayings during her trip on shore, and, when she had exhausted her news, listened with unusual patience to Sara’s encounter in the streets.

“It was a good thing they came by,” she exclaimed; “and Roger Hyde is said to be a splendid soldier. He did good work in Egypt when a mere boy. He is charmingly good-looking, and so amusing, but as wild as a hawk. He gambles. His old uncle has had to pay his debts twice over, and he is quite infatuated about a married woman. She is in Malta now—very handsome, years older than he is, with a husband almost in his dotage. She is as cool and calculating as the cashier in a

bank, and she means to marry Roger when her old man drops off his perch.”

“Dies, you mean?”

“Of course! For she knows that Roger will come in for a large fortune. He is his uncle’s heir. Meanwhile she keeps him, as it were, a dog on the chain, and throws him a look or a word now and then. I hate to see a handsome, promising young man the slave of a creature like that. He is the talk of the place, the laughing-stock of the garrison.”

“But you have had slaves yourself?” said Sara, boldly.

“Yes, of a sort. Mine were comparatively free men, and used to come and go, and had some holidays, and I never hoarded one up in a cold-blooded way with the intention of some day making him my second husband.”

“Did you see her—I mean this lady?”

“Yes, in her carriage. Just outside Truefit’s, with a poor old creature in a fur coat, bolstered up beside her. She has golden hair, dyed, of course—and was probably at Truefit’s for a new supply. She is most shamefully made up!”

“And is she handsome?” inquired the other.

“Yes, with a cold, carved face, that looks as if it were carved out of marble—large, icy grey eyes, and a big woman, splendidly dressed. The cut of her gown was something to see. I wonder who is her dressmaker? I would give a good deal to know!”

“And you say she has great influence over Mr. Hyde?”

“Influence is a poor expression. You may have read of that new thing called hypnotism in the papers. It’s more like that. She can make him do anything, just as if she had thrown him into a trance, and told him he was a cat, and to go and catch mice. He is nothing more than a will-less automaton! He cannot call his soul his own!”

“Poor young man! He seemed quite different to that. It was his nerve and will that saved us in the streets,” exclaimed Sara.

“Yes; but she was not there. Had she beckoned him from a corner or a doorway he would have turned and left you to your fate!”

“I don’t think so,” very firmly.

“You don’t think so,” examining her



curiously. "My good Sara, be advised by me. Put that romantic meeting out of your head, and don't think of him at all. No good can come of it. He is handsome, he is fast. He is not in your own rank of life. He has a furious temper, as you may expect from his ruddy looks—very pretty hair, I grant you. He is the heir of a most malignant, but enormously rich old man, who has made a fortune in tallow, and who is fully determined that his nephew shall marry rank. No matter about money, appearance, or much else, but rank—rank—rank!"

"Then he does not know of Mr. Hyde's friend out here?" said Sara, demurely.

"No. If he did he would be out in the next steamer! He would go to the War Office—or out of his mind; but I am sure he will know ere long. Some kind friend is certain to tell him."

In default of anyone else Mrs. Plummer had secretly made up her mind that this kind friend would be herself. She knew old Robert Hyde, and had partaken of his sumptuous and heavy dinners in Portland place, and had swallowed his champagne and his compliments.

Mrs. Dering, Roger's enlivener, had put up her eye-glass, and looked at her insolently, as she stood on Trueitt's steps.

She did not know who she had to deal with, and that took should cost her dear. It should cost her Roger Hyde; and Mrs. Plummer told herself that she would be able to punish this creature, and carry out a good notion of one and the same time!

Sara Parr had taken the measure of her mistress's character. Once landed in London she would wave her to the winds, and never think of her again. Now was her opportunity—when they were alone—to get a character and reference from this slightly, fashionable lady.

"What are you going to do with yourself when we arrive, Sara, for we part by mutual consent on board, I believe?" she asked one day. "I am going to the Hotel Metropole to meet my sister, and I can share her maid."

"Yes—I shall look out at once for a situation, and I hope you will kindly give me a recommendation and a reference."

"Recommendation! Yes, with pleasure. Reference! that is another matter. I shall be here and there and everywhere—in London, Paris, Scotland. Still, I can give you my brother-in-law's address."

"I suppose you know no one likely to be requiring a maid?"

"No. How should I? You forget I come from Calcutta; and, besides, your hairdressing would not do for town. You do mine very well, but I have shown you, and there are no end of new ways. You will have to take lessons. You can mend. Can you make?"

"No, I am afraid not. I can learn."

"Yes, by serving your time. I am afraid you will be only eligible for a cheap place, with some mild old lady in the country," said Mrs. Plummer, frankly.

"That would suit me exactly, if the mild old lady were in town."

"What! you wish to live in London?" looking at her with keen scrutiny.

"Yes."

"I should have thought you had had a dose of town."

"At least I'll try and like London," she answered, with determination.

"You have some reason for wishing to live there?"

"I have."

"And is that all you are going to tell me?"

"At present. If we meet again I promise to tell you more."

"It is mysterious—mysterious, Sara Parr. Get me my blotter and the ink that I may write you out what is called a 'bit' in India, and a character at home."

And taking a sheet of her best-treated paper she began to scribble, and then to read aloud.

"Sara Parr, the bearer of this, has accom-

panied me home from India in the capacity of—"

"Are there two p's in capacity? No, I thought not."

"Maid and companion. She was well recommended to me in Calcutta, and I have found her most satisfactory in every respect. She can do hair, mend lace most beautifully, and read aloud pleasantly." She panted.

"Eh, Sara! What else shall I say?"

"Say that I am a good nurse in illness."

"A good nurse in illness, patient, energetic and good-tempered. Eh! Will that do?"

"Excellent! Thank you a thousand times!"

"And that I hope she may meet with a comfortable home. I may as well put that in too, and it is true."

"If you like. Thank you very much," as she received it, folded and placed it in an envelope. This would be her stepping-stone to her father's house. From the situation this would, she hoped, procure, she would prosecute her researches into the history of her own family. It was well that she had taken these precautions beforehand. Once in Victoria basin, London Docks, all her boxes packed—all her packages ready for disembarkation—Mrs. Plummer paid her ten sovereigns, shook hands, wished her good-bye, and giving over her luggage to an agent, had her dressing-bag and a small portmanteau placed in a bansom, and drove away, and Sara was left alone. Well, at any rate, she had ten pounds, a good character, and about thirty pounds in savings. Her affairs were in a promising state. Where was she to go first, and what was she to do? Could her friend Benmore, the steward, recommend her to quiet and cheap lodgings?

"Yes. His mother had a very neat, respectable place within two miles of the docks. When he had done his work and got leave he would take her there himself, if she would wait for him. He would not be long."

She waited, of course, and in a couple of hours she and Benmore were rolling away in a four-wheeler, with all her worldly goods upon the roof. Benmore was in the seventh heaven. To have the object of his affection in his own home as lodger was bliss indeed. She was cool, kind, and inaccessible. It was true he was a notorious flirt, and she was the first ladies' maid who had not met him half-way. No; she had not a notion of flirting. She was what was called "too aristocratic" for that.

"You and me, Miss Parr, is very good friends," he said, in the fulness of his simple sailor heart. "I never saw a girl took my fancy like you. If you and mother was to hit it off, maybe—"

"Mr. Benmore, your mother has nothing to do with me, except as a lodger," she interrupted quickly. "I am going to tell you a secret, and throw off my disguise. I am not a servant in reality. I am a well-educated lady, and I have come home from India, secretly, in the way you have seen, to try and find out something about my people. You and I have been friends. You will keep my secret?"

"Yes," regarding her for a moment in unspeakable astonishment.

"And promise not to breathe a word of it, even to your mother?"

"I promise," he returned, rather ruefully.

"I have been all my life at school in India up in the hills. My father is a rich man. He lives in London. He won't allow me to come home—he has not seen me for sixteen years. He won't write to me, hear from me, support me. He forbids me to leave India. I have come to London under an assumed position, and mean to discover for myself the reason of all this."

"You are a plucky girl—you have it in your face. I wish you good luck with all my heart. I thought all along you were a touch above us—and above Mrs. Plummer, too. She's a mean one, with all her diamonds. She only gave the

cabin steward half a sovereign between them; but what you tell me is a blow—a blow!"

"I am sorry to hear that. I hope you will still be as you have always been, my steady friend. I want one badly."

"Ay, I will; and there's Jack Benmore's hand on it. And here's home; and there's the old lady peeping over the blind. She knew the *Penguin* was signalled from Gravesend, I'll go bail. Won't she stare when she sees me arriving with all that luggage, and a young lady in tow!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BENMORE was considerably amazed at the article her son had brought her this voyage—not a parrot, nor a Persian cat or a mongoose, but a young woman—"a lady," he whispered, "who would pay well."

Mrs. Benmore, a sharp-faced old woman, very trim and tidy and talkative, with an aggressively false brown front, and a somewhat red nose, became immediately all smiles, and conducted Sara to her chamber, paid the cabin-man, and sent her up a cup of tea, excusing herself from further attendance, as she wanted to have a talk with her son—her dear Sammy!

Sara was not sorry to be left alone. She closed the door, removed her hat—the one she had bought to bewitch Mr. Richard Lamb—and, having opened the window, sat down to sip her tea—woman's great creature comfort, which stands to them in place of a man's pipe.

The room was small—a regular sky parlour, but very neat and clean. The walls were papered with dazzling roses, the boards were sanded, and in the middle of the apartment was a square of darned carpet. There was a small iron bedstead; a chest of drawers, on which stood a looking glass, two chairs, and a wash-ing stand summed up the furniture.

The view outside comprised, apparently, miles and miles of states and chimneys; the air was smoky, the sky a heavy London grey.

What a change from Shantinagar! In either place you looked out on a dazzling blue sky and pines, and hushed upre, clear hill air.

But that was in the heart of the Himalayas, and this was in the heart of London. And there was a difference. Instead of the thrushes and caucalos calling to one another across the valley, here was theullen roar of perpetual traffic.

The change was of her own seeking, and she must abide by her choice.

"Choice!" she repeated, angrily. "I had no choice. I was bound to come!"

Presently she finished her tea, bathed her face, arranged her hair and dress, and descended to a gaudy, stuffy, little sitting-room, in which Benmore and his mother had been having a long tête-à-tête.

He had painted the new lodger's prospects in glowing colours. She was a rich young lady come to see after her rights, with grand relations in London. So much for his capacity to keep a secret.

"Then I can't ask her less than twenty-five shillings a week for room and board—the back top room."

"What does Jessie Cava pay?"

"Oh, she—fifteen shillings."

"I think you had better ask the same, mother."

"No. Why should I? One is only a working-milliner, and finds it hard to pay even that; the other is rich. Why, it's dirt cheap. Look at the price of meat! To be sure I give fish pretty often. Why, a good steak is eighteenpence."

"But you buy frozen meat," said her simple son.

"Yes; and dear enough it is. And look at coal and gas!"

"I know; but Miss Parr has not much money now, it's all to come; so you must let her down easy."

"Well, I'll say a pound; I can't go no lower

than that. And here she is," rising and smiling obsequiously, and offering a chair. "We were just talking of you, miss. And I was saying to Sam that if you could manage to put up with our small house and humble ways I'd be proud to have you. My terms, inclusive for board and lodging, is one pound a week."

"Thank you," said Sara. "I think that would suit me very well. I am not at all rich, as Mr. Benmore will have told you, and at present economy is an object."

"This don't include cleaning boots and hot water, mind you. Breakfast, tea, bread and butter, and an egg; dinner, meat and potatoes, or fish; tea, bread and butter, and, maybe, a lettuce, or a few cookies. I call it a liberal table for the terms," said Mrs. Benmore, with much complacency.

"It will do very well indeed, thank you," murmured Sara.

"Well, we are just going to have a snack now. I have a supper ready, as I expected Sammy. There's a dish of tripe, and onions and some steak. Sammy is very partial to tripe, isn't you, Sam?"

In the dining-room—a small, gloomy apartment, looking out on a water barrel and a cistern—the cloth was laid, the gas turned on, and as they took their seats another person came into the room—a very delicate-looking girl, with pretty timid eyes, and a stoop.

"Oh, Jessie, how are you?" said Benmore, jumping up as he spoke. "How have you been since I saw you?"

"Better, thank you. My cough is almost gone!"

"Ay, in the daytime," amended his mother, harshly; "but it is as bad and worse at night. It keeps me awake far worse than the cats on the tiles."

"Miss Cave—Miss Parr," said Benmore, anxious to divert the conversation. "Miss Parr came home with us, Jessie, from Calcutta, and she is going to stop a while with mother. I hope you and she will hit it off," and he glanced appealingly at the new comer.

"I am sure we shall!" said Sara, impulsively. She had taken a fancy to her fellow-lodger on the spot. She pitied her, she looked so ill, and yet she was so young and pretty, and undoubtedly, she was snubbed and set upon by Mrs. Benmore. Would Mrs. Benmore prove another Mrs. Cock? No, she was not like her; she had no social aspirations. All her mind was riveted on her bank-book, and on Sammy; first on her savings, then on her son! She was a miser, while he was as open-handed as most sailors are.

She liked Jessie Cave well enough. She was sweet-tempered and gentle, never rejoined when sharply scolded, and never murmured at rancid butter, stale fish, and weak tea. Also her fifteen shillings came in pretty regular; but Jessie was in bad health, consumptive. Death was already written on her face. How would it be when she was unable to ply her trade, and was thrown out of her situation?

Every day that event came nearer. Every day poor Jessie's eyes were brighter, her breath shorter, her cough more incessant; and supposing Jessie Cave was thrown upon her hands, a bed-ridden beggar, that would be a nice state of affairs! And Sam had rather a weak spot for Jessie. Next voyage he made she would get rid of her quietly, by hook or by crook, although she had been with her for eighteen months, and was no trouble and good pay—at present.

Jessie and Sara became excellent friends in less than a week. Women's friendships are often of rapid growth, and they even confided in one another. Jessie's was a sad story, the story of an orphan.

She was literally alone in the world. Her father had been a farmer in Devonshire—an offshoot of a good but decayed old stock, who had fallen from their former estate to yeomen, and subsequently to poverty.

Mr. Cave, Jessie's father, was a dreamy, indolent, impractical man, who had married a pretty milliner from Plymouth instead of a

capable farmer's daughter, who would have brought him some money, and been able to manage the dairy and poultry—ay, and the whole establishment! Instead of which young Mrs. Cave barely knew a cabbage from a cauliflower, and could do nothing whatever in the way of housekeeping, but spent her days in trimming herself very smart bonnets and arranging flowers in the sitting-room; whilst her husband moaned about the place and talked about his ancestors, instead of being up and busy in the present.

He lived amidst the glories of the past. The natural result was not long in coming. Bad seasons, borrowing, mortgages, soon swept away the very last acre from the last of the Cavens, and he died in a wretched lodging in Plymouth of a broken heart.

His widow and daughter, aged ten, went up to London—the former full of hope, trusting to make a livelihood by her old trade. She was just barely able to support herself and Jessie, for her "hand was out," her ideas old-fashioned.

Jessie, however, served her time, and became a valuable help, so much so that Mrs. Cave—ever of a sanguine temperament—actually set up a small shop on her own account; and here she struggled on for two years, fighting against poverty and bankruptcy, and finally swooned, leaving Jessie nothing in the world to live by but her needle and thread.

Jessie was an expert workwoman, and commanded good wages—a pound a week. She was head milliner in a popular East-end establishment, where the customers had gaudy tastes; and many of Jessie's works of art might be seen on penny steamboats on holidays and Sundays, or enlivening the prospect at Battersea-park on hand days.

Jessie was quiet and retiring, and made no friends. She was considered "stuck up." She did not frequent theatres or music-halls, and she had no young man.

The truth was, the state of her health made her lethargic and silent. She did her work mechanically from week's end to week's end. On Sundays she went once a day to a gloomy old City church that smelt like a vault, and all her affections were bestowed on a pet canary—the bane of Mrs. Benmore's life, she said—with its horrid noise, and the desire and despair of all the cats in the neighbourhood.

Sara Parr told all her history and all her plans to the milliner before she had known her ten days, and enlisted her warmest interest and sympathy.

"I know you will succeed," she said. "You have a lucky face. You will be a rich woman yet, and have your rights."

"I hope so; but I am not very clear about that. Time will tell. So far I have had no success."

She had made her way to 999, Eaton-place, only to discover the whole house shut up, the shutters closed, and to be informed by a dirty charwoman from the area "that the whole family was gone abroad for six months, and she could not tell where they were."

Meanwhile, she must earn some money, and go into service; but she put off this by Benmore's special request, until the Penguin had taken her departure.

He paid Sara great attention, took her to the Tower, to Madame Tussaud's, to the park, all of which were delightful sights to the Indian-born girl. Twice he escorted her and Jessie to the theatre, and they sat in the pit and sucked oranges, and laughed and wept, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

In a conspicuous place in a conspicuous box Sara despatched Mrs. Plummer, surrounded by a gay and fashionable party, brilliant with rings and diamonds. She did not see her former maid, but then the maid was in the pit, and not sitting in the fierce light that beats upon the stage box.

Whilst Benmore was at home the house-keeping was comparatively liberal, the butter was fair, and the fish was fresh, and he often

brought home some dainty, such as fruit, or a cake, or a couple of crabs for supper.

When he departed there was a new regime. Although Mrs. Benmore had assured him that she would be kind to Jessie, and would take great care of Miss Parr, she had secretly resolved to get rid of them both—yes, both. She did not believe in Sara Parr's coming fortune. She had no faith in her future; but she kept her opinions to herself until Sammy had sailed.

The girl had no photographs, jewellery, or good clothes she knew, for she had locked. She had also examined her purse. It contained nearly thirty pounds. When that was gone where was Miss Parr going to get more?

She was a handsome girl, and Sammy had taken a fancy to her. He would marry her if he was let alone; and, supposing he did, what would be the good of a penniless, useless, fine lady wife, who could not scrub the floors, or cook the dinner, and would probably sit on a chair all day reading a novel, and expecting to be waited on, and fed, and housed just like a lady?

Oh, no! That would be a poor bargain for Sam Benmore, and was out of the question as long as he had a wise and careful mother.

There were several good matches she had for him "in her eye," notably Fanny Price, the only daughter of Price the publican, at the Thunder and Lightning public. She was smart and buxom, and partial to Sammy, and sometimes looked in on his mother of a Sunday evening.

She would have a good fortune down, and the goodwill of the business at her father's death. Indeed, there was no reason why Price should not take a steady young man like Sam into partnership, and Sam might cut the sea. And Sammy had savings, though he was wickedly extravagant, bringing home delicacies, treating the girls to the theatre, and buying a new cage for Jessie's canary.

For a fortnight after Sam's departure she did not show her hand, and there was no difference in their daily life, save that the meals were squashed and insufficient, and there was a painful skimpiness in the matter of coal and gas.

Sara was taking lessons in hairdressing from a hairdresser in the Strand, and practising on Jessie's tresses when she was at home. Jessie had also given her one or two excellent lessons in millinery. She could now line a hat or bonnet as well as a professional. This is one of the tests of an amateur, and where they fail. She could make bows, and put on velvet binding, and proved an apt pupil.

She was very anxious to be an efficient maid, to get a place in the higher circles, and especially to procure a situation in the neighbourhood of Eaton-place or Eaton-square.

Ladies who lived in that part of the world expected their abigails not merely to look smart, but to know their business, and Sara was rapidly becoming an excellent milliner and hairdresser.

She made an expedition to Lombard-street, and saw one of the clerks at Messrs. Dombey and Sons. Could he give her any information about Mr. Paekie, and when he might be expected home?

"No, not just then. The gentleman who could inform her was out. Would she call another day?"

"Yes, she would," she answered, decisively. Meanwhile, she put an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post* as follows, having consulted Jessie Cave, and exhibited Mrs. Plummer's recommendation with some pride.

The advertisement ran as follows:—

"LADIES' MAID.—Respectable young person wishes situation in gentleman or nobleman's family in London. Good hairdresser and milliner. No objection to travel for a short time. Can be well recommended by former mistress.—Address S. Parr, care of Mrs. Benmore, 17, Harrist street, Tower Hamlets."

When Sara read the above in print in the *Morning Post* she felt a glow of pride, and as

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if half the battle were won already. The same day she paid another visit to Lombard-street, and interviewed a spare, severe-looking gentleman, who said "he was prepared to give Mr. Passe's address if she would state her name and business." (Mr. Passe had been forewarned.)

This she firmly declined to do. She had business with him only, and could not state it to a third party. So she was politely bowed away, and shown out through a big swing door, with her mind in a ferment of indignation.

Never mind, said common sense, he cannot run away altogether; he must come back to Eaton-place some time. Everything comes to her who waits.

She now took an omnibus home, her thoughts filled with her recent repulse. It was crowded, and she was so tightly jammed in between two fat people that she had the greatest difficulty in getting out her purse to pay her fare.

When she was taking off her hat upstairs she put her hand in her pocket, intending to look up her money, forgetting a warning she had received.

She had twenty pounds in her pocket, and her character too. People from India, not being used ever to carry money about with them, are careless and forgetful at home, and have no experience or dread of pickpockets, and have been known to leave their purse on shop-counters and walk out, or in cabs, or at railway stations, and never miss it.

Sara plunged her hand into her pocket, and found it empty! Not even her pocket handkerchief was left.

Her heart stood still. It was not only her money that was gone—all but five pounds in a five-pound note, that she providentially had left at home—but what was of far more importance, her only recommendation, and she had no means of replacing it.

She did not know Mrs. Pinmmer's whereabouts, and that feather-headed lady had given her no address. There was an address on her character; but, alas! Sara could not remember it. All she could recall was "South Kensington," and South Kensington is a large place.

What was she to do? She flew downstairs with a white face, and reported her loss to Mrs. Benmore, who received the news in a surprisingly unsympathetic manner.

"Served her right! No one but a mad woman would carry her money about with her in the streets, and, above all in a bus. What else could she expect but to be robbed. Chance of recovering it? Send to the police? Yes, if she liked. She might as well write to the man in the moon! The money was changed. Her papers torn up long ago."

Poor Sara had but small appetite for her weak tea and stale bread and butterine. What was she to do?

She had but five pounds in the world, and she owed a week's lodging, and some fifteen shillings to the professor of hair-dressing.

She consulted with Jessie, sitting on the bed in Jessie's attic, and Jessie told her to keep up her heart. There were far worse misfortunes.

She was not penniless. She (Jessie) would think over her affairs that night and try and make some plans.

Things generally looked brighter in the morning. The next morning the early post brought no less than four letters addressed to Sara Parr—letters in thick, square, envelopes, with monograms; and each of the writers of these missives requested her to repair to their houses, at certain stated hours, in order to be interviewed with respect to her suitability as a lady's maid for the writer.

Alas! alas! Of what use were all these promising replies to her advertisement? How could she present herself for a place without a reference?

CHAPTER XIV.

In spite of Jessie Cave's meditations overnight Sara's prospect looked as gloomy as ever. Mrs. Benmore was as sharp-tongued to her now as to Jessie, and Sara's pale cheeks took a pinky tinge of mortification when she was abruptly asked,—

"Well, young woman! And may I ask what you are going to do, and how you are going to find bread to put in your mouth, and a roof over your head? You must stir yourself!"

"You are quite right," she answered, quickly, "I shall make some fresh plans this very day."

"Ay; and when you make them bear in mind that your room above is let from Monday week?"

"Yes, Mrs. Benmore, I shall not forget," forcing herself to speak with quiet composure, and having finished her meagre dinner she rose and left the room. It was a lovely afternoon in the end of May. She felt a yearning-like thirst for a breath of pure air, and a glimpse of grass and trees, instead of a smoky atmosphere, and a view of dirty brick walls. She sat pondering over plans in her own room, and then she went out and paid her debt to the hairdresser, and waited to walk home with Jessie from her place of business.

"You have not thought of anything have you?" she asked her anxiously.

"Yes," taking her arm, "and I'll tell you of it to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow?" She inquired in surprise.

"Because we have a whole holiday, and I am going to have a happy day for once. I am going to give you a treat, you and Dicky, the canary. You have never yet seen the English country, only your hills of pines, and tracts of sand in India; and I know you long, as I do, for a breath of fresh, pure air. I am country-bred, and this smoky city has killed me. Oh, Sara! if you could see our Devonshire lanes, deep and green, the green fields, full of sleek cattle, and see the faint blue line of the sea on the horizon, and smell the honeysuckle and primroses and hawthorn! Oh, if I could but see it all again! I never shall—never, but in my dreams. If I could even be buried there instead of some filthy, crowded city church-yard," and tears gathered in her eyes.

"Don't talk like that," interrupted her friend, "but tell me your plan for to-morrow."

"We will rise early, and buy some buns and hard-boiled eggs and a bottle of milk, take a bus to Waterloo, and go down to Hampton Court. We can ramble about between that and Bushey Park all day. Dine at an inn, and come home on the river by Richmond, Kew, and Twickenham."

"Delightful! But won't it cost a great deal of money?"

"Eight shillings at the most; and what is eight shillings to pay for one happy day—to lie on the grass under the horse-chestnuts, and listen to the booming of the bees in their blossoms, and to make believe that we are never coming back to Harriet-street or London!"

"What! indeed?" echoed Sara recklessly. The two girls carried out their programme to the letter. They rose early, and asked the slavey to give them each a cup of tea. Mrs. Benmore need not grudge it, said Jessie. She won't have to feed us for a whole day. They made their way to Hampton Court, and wandered through the galleries and the maze. At last they came to anchor under the trees in Bushey Park, and, having discussed their buns and eggs, prepared to discuss something still more important—their plans.

"Sara," said her friend, "I have been thinking hard about your future."

"And your out?" supplemented Sara, eagerly.

"No matter about mine. I have a short future in this world. I know that I am dying," looking wistfully at the shining landscape.

"No, no, no," said the other, in a choked voice.

"Yes, yes, yes," in a low, patient tone. "Do not be sorry. I do not think I fear it. I did once," with a long shivering sigh, at the memory of the dark hours. "But now the dread seems to have died. I pray it may not come back, and I shall have rest from the pain in my side; the constant struggling to keep up, and from life which offers no happiness, and which has become a burden."

"Oh, Jessie! and you are my only friend over here," said Sara, with a quiver in her voice. "You cannot leave me."

"And you are my only friend. Listen, Mrs. Benmore is tired of us both; of me, because she is afraid of my dying in her hands, a pauper; of you for fear Sam Benmore would marry you. So let us make a virtue of necessity, and leave her."

"Yes, but for where?"

"One of my hands knows of a double bedded room at four shillings a week—a great chance. Let us take it, and move in on Monday. We can feed ourselves far better than at Mrs. Benmore's, and for far less. You pay one pound and I fifteen shillings. For thirty-five shillings we shall live well, only we must not venture to spend that."

"I have only three pounds in the world, Jessie. Do you think I will live on you?"

"No. You will pay the rent. You will do the housekeeping and cooking; and you will have millinery from me. So that—that-some time or other you will be able to earn as much as I do."

The two girls lay under the trees, talking and turning over this plan in their minds. It was quite feasible, and Jessie, who was the woman of business, said,—

"This is Saturday. We move in on Monday. There is nothing about notice on either side, in our agreement with Mrs. B.—. She will be angry. She would like to wring every shilling from you first; but she shan't. Money is important to us, and I'll bear the brunt of her fury, as I have often done; and now let us go back and go. I can't say home. Our attic will be that, I hope."

"Yes. I'll make it smart, with some things I bought for my lodgings at Shirani," said Sara. "I have a clock, vases, some books, a table-cover and bedding, for in India that is never provided."

"And I," said the other, a kettle, a frying-pan, and saucepan; some plates and cups and saucers, and a pair of tongs and a bellow. We shall do very well indeed for the present."

Yes, and what of the future? They went back to Waterloo Bridge by steamboat. It was a raw evening—a treacherous May night. The river fog got into Jessie's lungs, and rushed her down the road to death months before her time. Had she worn a respirator, and thick shawl, and been indoor by sundown!

Mrs. Benmore opened the door herself, candle in hand, nightcap on head; the gas was turned off at the meter at ten o'clock, and it was now half-past ten.

"So you have come home," she said. "I scarcely expected you. I won't have such goings on in my house. You must bundle out both of you, at once." She meant by Monday week. "This is a place for quiet, well-conducted, people," her tongue sharpened by a twinge of toothache, her eyes inflamed by a glass of gin, neat.

"I am glad to hear it, Mrs. Benmore," said Jessie, hoarsely; "and since you say we are to bundle out we will leave on Monday morning."

"Yes, giving a week's rent instead of notice. Mind that!"

"Not a penny! You have given us notice, and there is no agreement between us on either side."

Mrs. Benmore was prepared to fall upon her in one of her furies when Sara said, sternly,—

"Yes, I am a witness, Mrs. Benmore, and you have no case. If you are troublesome in any way or abuse us or annoy us I shall go

to your clergyman, and make a formal complaint. I know you wish to stand well with him. I advise you to accept the inevitable, and to leave us in peace."

"I'll accept none of your insolence," she said, with unabated rage, "and I'll give you each a summons!" she shrieked. "Lady, indeed!"

But the doors upstairs were closed, and she was talking to the wind; and next morning she was calmer, and thought better of the matter, and on Monday they removed their effects, paid her due, and bade her a civil good-bye.

Well, she had lost two lodgers, and a clear profit of one pound a week. She brooded over this fact for half-an-hour, and then she came to the conclusion that they were a good riddance, when she took Sammy and consumption into her calculations, and she cheerfully put up once more her card in the window, "lodgings to let."

The two girls moved in. Their new quarters were in a poor part of the city, not nearly as genteel as Harriet street. A costermonger lived below, and a laundress had the drawing room, of what had once been the abode, say early in the seventeenth century, of some merchant prince. The stairs were dirty and crowded with children, but once within their own room there was cleanliness and peace.

Sara arranged everything neatly, while her companion went to her work, and by the time she returned to tea supper she scarcely knew the place, her friend had worked so hard. She had nailed up prints, hung curtains, unpacked and put away their clothes in an ancient wardrobe that leaned against the wall on three legs for support. She had been out marketing, and with the advice of the laundress had known where to procure a quartern loaf, butter, and "penorth" of milk, some cold ham, and a head of lettuce. She had laid in coal, candles, matches, soap. She had bought a teapot, and some rough dusters, and a low, second-hand chair for Jessie, and the evening paper, and, alas, she had made an enormous hole in a sovereign!

Jessie's delight well repaid her for her extravagance, and this was the beginning of many happy evenings.

Sara read aloud, whilst Jessie did odd jobs in millinery and gave her lessons; and during the day Sara would go West and stare into shops, and make little sketches, and bring home many new ideas "in her life." She mended their clothes, marketed, cooked and kept the accounts—such poor little accounts, and now and then they treated themselves to a trip to the country on Sunday.

September came, and with the first falling leaf Death, who had long stalked Jessie, seized upon her. She attributed her cold so-called to a severe wetting she had had. Nevertheless the truth dawned upon both girls, with a flash of inexpressible anguish, that this cold was but the beginning of the end. Jessie's health now failed suddenly and completely. She had had to give up her situation, and her welcome pound a week was a painful loss. Her employers could not afford to pension sick hands; times were bad, money was scarce—how scarce with these two girls cannot be described. Jessie with the death damp on her forehead, the death-gleam in her eye, would sit propped up, pinning bows and ribbons for Sara to sew in hats. She still had a little outside work from a firm that sold cheap articles—"trimmed hats, two shillings," so there was not much margin for the milliner—twopence a hat and her own thread.

She had grown so feeble; but still she struggled passionately against the cold tide of death creeping up ever higher and higher to drag her away from life and her friend.

If she could see her beyond the reach of want it would be less hard to die; if her love could avail anything—but it had been useless, as vain and useless as her life.

The days dragged on, and the little stock of money sank with Jessie's strength.

Often Sara was on the brink of despair. If she were in India the sisters of Mrs. Glasher would help her, but she had not a friend in all London, not Mrs. Benmore, not Dombey and Son—not one.

Jessie could not sit up. Even her scanty earnings ceased. (The rent was three weeks overdue.) She had fought hard against being quite bedridden, but the poor effort had to be given up.

Sara knew her way well to the nearest pawnshop. Nearly all their belongings were there—Jessie's gown and hat among them, for she had said,—

"I shall never need them again! And, oh, Sara! Sara!" she sobbed, "it is weak and foolish of me to mind, but when I go I must have a pauper's funeral! I shall be buried in a shell—two feet down—among the great bed of nettles in the corner of St. David's graveyard! I can see the place!" and she shuddered. "I meant to have kept mother's wedding-ring to pay for my borrying, I cannot now," she gasped. "We have had no bread since yesterday, no fire for two days. I cannot let you perish too. Take it!"

"I shall lay it out on flowers. They say they pay. It may bring us luck, Jessie, dear! Things must mend."

And, as she spoke, the door opened, and the good-natured laundress came in with a large cup of tea and a piece of buttered toast.

The girl in the garret had not been down for two days; the other was going fast. They took in no loaves or milk now, and were in arrears with their rent. It is the poor who are good to the poor.

Jessie swallowed the tea thankfully, but pushed the toast to her friend, who had been reading it with wolfish, ravenous eyes.

Sara divided it in two parts, and ate her share like a starving creature. Yes, Mrs. Combe could see that.

She offered to sit with Jessie whilst her friend went out to the pawnshop.

She had seen the ring, and appraised it, and said,—

"Don't let it go under seven-and-sixpence. It's thick, good gold. Don't let them do you."

And Sara, putting on her shawl—her hat was in pawn—sallied forth.

When the ring was gone, when this seven-and-sixpence was spent (it was owed, for that matter), what were they to do?

If she could only get sewing or teaching, how willingly she would work, and how hard—for a mere pittance, for enough to keep soul and body together. But no one would employ her.

She had tried shop after shop; she had appealed to half the small tradesfolk within a radius of three miles. She would give their girls music and singing lessons so cheap—she had been well taught. But these were mere needy creatures. Trading was a drag. And she was so thin and pale and shabby. Her boots were burst; she had no gloves, she was gaunt with hunger.

One indulgent fishmonger's wife, struck by her pathetic eyes and imploring words, had said.—

"Well, there's such a heap of impostors going about, there is no knowing. But if you like to come in and give us a tune and a song in the back parlour I'll not hinder you, and we can judge what you can do."

A tune! a song! Still she made a great effort. She struck a few chords on a dreadful old instrument, and endeavoured to sing "Home, sweet home!" she, who had never known a home. The very first word stuck in her throat; no sound would come, her voice was gone. She was dumb.

"Well, why don't you strike up? Sing something lively!" said the audience, consisting of the fishmonger's wife and her two half-grown daughters and a neighbour.

"I cannot," she faltered, in a whisper.

"Ab, another of your impostors! Since you

can't sing you may just walk out. There's the door, miss!"

"Madam, I am starving! If you would give me a bit of bread—a crust even—"

"No, not a crumb. You have your story pat—they all have. Stay, who do you belong to—who are your people? Even if I did employ you, who is to speak for you?"

No one. Here was the rock that stood in her way always. No respectable people would employ her to sew or to teach—without a reference!

(To be continued.)

THE MILLIONAIRE'S DAUGHTER.

—10—

CHAPTER XXXVI.—(continued.)

"TELL me the truth, doctor," Miss Graham whispered, tremulously. "Is it life—or death?"

"I cannot deceive you," he answered, sorrowfully. "I would advise, if you have any affairs of this life to settle, that they be done at once. You cannot see to-morrow's sunrise unless Heaven performs something like a miracle. I am constrained to tell you the truth. Is there anyone you wish sent for?"

"Yes; my lawyer," she said, falteringly, and named him.

When Mr. Hope entered the room he found Miss Graham failing very fast.

As he had supposed, she sent for him to draw up her last will and testament.

She left all her wealth without reserve to Vesta South, and directed that the girl, who still lived and suffered with a broken heart in her bosom, should inherit her entire fortune, and it was left to the lawyer to search for the girl—find her and reinstate her in Miss Graham's deserted home.

The next morning the papers all rang with the announcement of the death of "Miss Graham, the beautiful society belle," as they termed her.

Eric Soddart heard it with a start of dismay.

"It was well for me that I discounted that cheque for five thousand last night," he told himself, exultantly.

Meanwhile Vesta, all unconscious of the manner in which fate had provided for her, was battling with the great question of life—what should she do to earn her own living?

One place after another she sought until she had exhausted all the marked places she had on her list in the newspaper she carried.

Two places seemed especially providential, and at both places they seemed well impressed with the lovely, dignified girl who bore the unmistakable sign of the inherent breeding of a lady, and were just on the point of concluding arrangements with her when in both instances a note was handed them—a mysterious three-cornered note, and in both cases she was dismissed curtly and promptly from their presence.

When this had occurred a third time Vesta was greatly puzzled. She felt convinced that the mysterious notes that had made their appearance had in some way affected her.

Vesta made her way back to her friend, and informed her, with a burst of tears, of the result of the day's search.

"Never mind; you will have better luck tomorrow, my dear," declared the gentle old lady, kindly.

Ah, how grateful Vesta was to her for those words of sympathy!

The morrow found her at the station, waiting eagerly until after the train came in. Then—as Dora failed to appear—she resumed her weary task of the day before. But in every case, while she was speaking, the three-cornered notes made their appearance; and then, without one word of excuse, the people turned from her with hard, cold faces and harsh voices.

Vesta felt certain that these notes were in reference to herself. But when she mentioned it to Mrs. Blake that lady scouted the idea.

"It is simply a coincidence and nothing more, my dear child; you magnify trifles," she declared.

But when Vesta came back the third day with same strange story, Mrs. Blake wondered if there could not be something in it after all.

"Inquire the next time, my dear, if the note has any reference to yourself," she suggested. "It really does look strange. Have you any enemy in London?"

"No," replied Vesta, "I am a perfect stranger here."

But suddenly as she spoke she remembered James Bruce, and his threat that he would drive her to come to him yet—he knew a way. Should she tell Mrs. Blake of it? No, she could not bring herself to mention it.

A fourth day resulted in the very same experience, and the mysterious notes put in their appearance regularly wherever she went. Vesta was quite sure now that they held some damaging reference to herself.

The girl was in despair. Should she tell Mrs. Blake all, or battle silently and alone against adverse fate? No, she could not bring herself to mention Bruce's name.

Was this what he meant by his terrible vow—to force her to come to him, or starve?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN Dora Saville recovered from her swoon, which lasted several hours, at the station, she found the telegram which had Vesta's name signed to it awaiting her, stating that she had gone on to Southampton.

No pen could portray Dora's intense grief at the state of affairs—Vesta alone in a strange city, homeless, friendless, penniless. The picture brought to Dora's mind the keenest dismay.

How she lived over the time that intervened until the next train-time she never fully remembered afterwards. The long journey seemed like a nightmare to her.

Dora made the change of trains in London for the remainder of her trip, little dreaming as she crossed the great, busy metropolis to the Surrey side how near poor Vesta was at that moment.

When she reached Southampton it was nearly midnight, and the great city lay asleep in night's embrace, watched over by the pale, silent moon and golden stars.

Where could she go until the morrow's light—what should she do? No wonder Dora was bewildered, and bitter tears welled up from her eyes as she thought of Vesta's awful terror when the previous night had settled darkly around her. Where had the poor girl gone without a shilling in her pocket?

Dora was wise; she inquired of an old porter where she could find a respectable lodging-house near by.

The man directed her to one street away.

"Are you all alone, miss?" he asked, touching his cap.

"Yes," said Dora, timidly, hesitating a little before answering.

"The reason I ask, miss, is because I have a daughter of my own about your age. She lives out in a little village near here. She is motherless, poor soul! I—I should not like to have her come to this place alone, and at night. For her sake I should like to know that you reach the place I have directed you to in safety. Can I send a policeman with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I shall be sure to find it all right," returned Dora, nervously.

Like all young girls she had a great hesitancy about being seen walking along with a sturdy guardian of the peace lest the passers-by might imagine she was in his custody under arrest.

"If you follow my directions carefully you cannot miss it, miss," said the porter, touching his cap to her.

He watched her with kindly interest until

the darkness hid her from his view; then a sigh fell from his lips—yet he could not have told why he sighed. Perhaps he thought of what might happen in the life of his little daughter when he was no more.

Meanwhile Dora hurried on with fleet footsteps, but ere half of the distance was traversed she became quite bewildered. She could not tell whether he had said turn to the right or the left at the first corner she came to.

She turned to the right. Alas! for poor Dora! She had made a pitiful error.

She traversed some distance ere she discovered her mistake; then she turned back to retrace her steps, and in doing so she ran directly into the arms of a young man coming down the street.

"Ah!" he cried, stopping directly in front of a lamp-post, and looking admiringly into her pale, frightened face, "what a pretty bird is to be flying so far away from its cage at this time of night! Whither are you bound, my angel?"

"Dora drew back, white with terror, for he had stopped deliberately before her, barring her progress.

"Step aside, and let me pass!" she cried, panting. "How dare you insult a young lady in this manner?"

"Insult!" he cried, with an uproarious laugh. "That is a good word to use, upon my honour! Girls roaming about at this hour of the night shouldn't call it much of an insult if a fellow accosts them. Egad! they rather like it. That's what they want—what they are looking for, you know, my dear!"

He had grasped her arm as he spoke, and was looking down with great admiration into the girl's face.

A terrible faintness seized Dora. She quite thought she should fall down dead at his feet. Her brain was whirling. She could feel her heart suddenly stop beating and the life blood stand still in her veins; but with a mighty effort she controlled herself.

"If you are a gentleman, you will allow an unprotected girl to pass," she sobbed. "Let me go!"

"One doesn't often come across a bird-of-paradise," he cried, "and when one does, I vow he'd be a fool to let her go. You've the prettiest face I ever saw! I propose that we get better acquainted. You'll find me a rattling good fellow, pretty one!"

A scream broke from Dora's lips—a shrill scream of the wildest terror.

"Hush! curse you!" hissed the fellow. "Do you want to arouse the whole town? I'll pay you back for this with a vengeance! I'll—"

The sentence never was finished, for at that moment a young man, who had come out of the dark shadow of an adjacent cigar shop, sprung forward like a flash, and the next moment Dora's assailant was measuring his full length on the pavement at the girl's feet.

"Take that! and that!" you villainous scoundrel!" cried her preserver, in a voice ringing with indignation as he administered two excellent and decided telling kicks with the toe of his polished boot upon the rascal. "I ought to thrash you wiser than an inch of your life for this—give you something to remember!" he cried, angrily.

Dora's persecutor sprang to his feet as quickly as possible, losing no time in taking himself off.

Dora was standing faint and trembling with excitement, leaning heavily against the lamp-post.

"I am glad that I happened to be in time to relieve you from a very unpleasant companion," he said, raising his hat to her with great deference. "If I can be of further assistance to you I beg that you will command me. Pardon me, but I must add—a lady should not be alone on the streets at this hour. Will you not permit me to see you safely to your destination? What you have passed through in this instance is likely to happen you at any street corner."

When he had first spoken the thought had

occurred to Dora that she had heard that voice before; and, as he faced round under the light, she recognised him.

"Mr. Stoddart!" she articulated, faintly. "Is it you? Oh! I am so glad! so glad!"

Ralph Stoddart—for it was he, who had just arrived from London—drew back in amazement.

Who was this young girl who spoke his name? He peered curiously into her face, and then he reeled backward, as though someone had struck him a sudden and terrible blow.

"Dora Saville!" he gasped. "Am I mad—or dreaming?"

Dora had parted from him in anger. She was glad enough to cling to his protecting arm now, with the most pitiful of sobs.

"Can this really be you, Miss Saville," he cried, "or is this some trick of a strange resemblance. I am amazed—nonplussed. Answer me."

"Yes, I am Dora Saville," she sobbed.

"Far away from home and out alone in the streets at midnight!" he gasped. "Why, I can hardly credit my senses."

"I am indeed Dora Saville," she repeated, adding piteously: "Please take me away from this spot, and I will tell you all about it," and the girl commenced to sob afresh.

"But where can I take you, Dora?" he asked in utter bewilderment. "Where are you stopping?"

"I have just arrived by the train from London," she faltered, "and was looking for a lodging to which I had been directed, and lost my way."

"What is the number of it?" asked Ralph. "I will see you safely to it. We can talk as we walk along."

She gave him the street and number.

"Why, that is a good mile from here," he declared. "I will call a cab."

Without waiting for her to reply he hailed a passing vehicle, into which he placed Dora, taking a seat by her side.

"Now then, Miss Saville," he said, as the vehicle was fully under headway, "do tell me, I beg of you, what brings you here, and in the predicament in which I found you?"

Poor Dora was overjoyed at meeting this true and loyal friend in the hour of her need.

Between her sobs and tears she told him all as the coach rolled along—of Mr. South's sudden death and of Vesta's startling discovery that she was not his child; how she had been cut off without a shilling in the world, and all the vast fortune which Mr. South had made abroad divided between Mr. South's young wife and herself; and how she refused to touch a penny of it, but followed Vesta's fortunes out into the world, which the girl declared she would face rather than remain there, a dependent upon Mrs. South's charity—and that the lady in question did not seem ill-pleased at Vesta's rescue.

Dora could hear Ralph Stoddart's breath come quick and hard as she told him that, and she hesitated about telling him the worst part of her story. Ah, how terrified he would be about Vesta—he loved her so! But it must be told, and the sooner the better. And so in broken words she told him how she and Vesta had become separated at the station; of the telegram she had received, stating that Vesta was going on to Southampton; and how the poor child was somewhere in the great city, alone, and without a penny in her pocket.

The effect of this upon Ralph was terrible. A groan burst from his white lips, and the bitter cry, "Oh, Heaven! Only Heaven knows what my darling may be enduring this very hour!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"I AM SO glad that I met you, Mr. Stoddart!" sobbed Dora. "You will help me to find Vesta. I do not know what I should have done without you; I do not know how or where to begin!"

"I will have some trace of her before day-break," declared Ralph. "To-morrow's sun shall not set without my having found her, Dora!"

Dora clasped her hands together in silent gratitude. Ah! how very grateful she was for his aid!

They reached the boarding-place at length which the old porter had recommended, and here Dora was to remain quietly until Ralph brought word of his success.

But when noon of the next day came and the hours of the long afternoon drew on apace, her anxiety knew no bounds.

Had something happened to Mr. Stoddart, too? she wondered, in a fright, as she paced restlessly up and down the space of the narrow, comfortless room that had been allotted to her.

At length there was a light tap on her door. Dora opened it eagerly.

"There is a gentleman down in the parlour who would like to see you, miss," said the maid-of-all-work.

"Is there a young girl—a beautiful, dark-eyed girl with him, do you know?" questioned Dora, breathlessly.

"I don't know, miss," replied the girl. "There's two or three ladies in the parlour, but I can't say whether they came with the young man or not—maybe they did."

Dora did not wait to hear the last of the girl's remarks, but with breathless haste flew down to the parlour.

She saw the moment she crossed the threshold that he was alone. She never forgot the face he turned to her; it was haggard and drawn, and white as death.

"Did you find her?" asked Dora, breathlessly.

Ralph Stoddart sunk into the nearest chair, covering his face with his trembling hands.

"Did you find her, Mr. Stoddart?" repeated Dora, hoarsely.

A bitter groan broke from his lips.

"I—I found a trace of her," he groaned.

"Something has happened to Vesta!" cried Dora, her voice sharpened with agony. "Tell me quickly what it is, Mr. Stoddart. I cannot bear suspense!"

"Yes, something has happened," he muttered, in a hollow voice; "but I am afraid the shock will surely kill you if I tell you; you love her so."

Dora's lips parted, but no sound issued from them, but he understood the mute treaty in her eyes.

"You are not able to bear it," he repeated, huskily.

She nodded her head faintly.

"Yes," she said, "tell me all."

"Vesta is—dead!" he whispered, in an awful voice.

He saw the words strike Dora as lightning strikes a fair flower. She quivered an instant from head to foot, then stood as silent, immovable before him as a statue carved in marble. He quite thought the terrible truth had slain her. He expected to see her fall dead at his feet.

But she did not; only the awful pallor of her face and the anguish in her beautiful blue eyes told him how keenly she suffered.

"Tell me about it," she murmured, huskily, "keep nothing back."

Ralph took her to the nearest seat and placed her upon it, sinking dejectedly into the chair nearest it.

"When I left you here last night I went directly to the police headquarters," he began, huskily, "for I knew that was the quickest and most effectual way of locating a stranger. I explained there the circumstances of her arrival here, and that she had no money about her."

"The train which she came in by was found—the conductor remembered a beautiful young girl had come in by it."

"It transpired that she was looking for a situation, for she was penniless. She found nothing to do—and—and—ah, Heaven! how

shall I finish the horrible sentence?" he groaned.

"Go on," whispered Dora, piteously, "tell me all."

"She—she found nothing to do, and so she was starving, and in a fit of desperation she jumped into the river and was drowned. Her body was not recovered, nor will it be until the sea gives up its dead, for long since the under-current, which was running swift at the time, has swept her body out to the ocean."

"Heaven pity us both, Dora, we loved her so! Oh, if I could only give my heart's blood to bring her back again, I would freely, ay, gladly give it! Life is less than nothing to me now."

"Only yesterday I fell heir to my father's estate. He died recently and left me all; but wealth has come to me too late. It cannot bring back my love to me, and all my wealth could not rescue her from her watery tomb."

His grief was so poignant that Dora was obliged to put aside her own great anguish and try her best to comfort him. She greatly feared Vesta's loss had affected him so deeply that he would follow her down into her watery grave.

"If I can bear it you can, Mr. Stoddart," she whispered, huskily. "Promise me that you will do nothing rash."

He looked up at her with bloodshot eyes.

"I shall not make away with myself, if that is what you mean," he said, slowly.

"I thank you for that assurance," she said. "Your words have taken a great load off my mind. I shall always think of you kindly for your great love for Vesta," she murmured, as he arose at last to take his departure.

"I hope to see you again—yes, often, Dora," he said, earnestly, as he held her slim little brown hand in his. "I would advise you to go back to Liverpool and take possession of the money Mr. South left you. You have no need to toil for your bread."

She recoiled from him with a white, set face, and there was a sudden flame in her calm eyes.

"I would sooner beg than touch one penny of it," she declared, "for it should have been Vesta's, not mine. She was brought up to believe herself an heiress, and that she should have everything that money could procure or luxury devise, while I—. Ah, Mr. Stoddart, I always looked forward to the day when I should go out and toil for my bread! I have grown accustomed to the thought—it has little terror for me. I can teach French, music, painting, drawing. I am an expert with the needle if I can find nothing else—or I can be governess to little children."

Suddenly a bright idea came to Ralph.

"I have something to propose to you, Dora," he said. "The death of our father left my little sister Eleanor—or Nelly, as we call her—quite alone in the world. She is not like other girls. She cannot enjoy the beautiful world outside, for Nelly is lame. She lives in the old house with an aged housekeeper. She would be glad of a companion like yourself. She suggested it once or twice to our father, but he scouted the idea—he was peculiar in his notions. But now Nelly shall have a companion, she is so lonely! Will you come to her, Dora? I would feel more contented to have her with you than anyone else in the whole world."

"Yes, I will go to her," responded Dora, "and I am very thankful for the opportunity."

"Nelly is at our home in Leeds," he said. "We will take the train down this afternoon. I will come for you, then."

Bitter as Dora's grief was when she found herself alone, she acknowledged to herself that Ralph Stoddart's grief was as poignant as her own.

When he came for her, as he had agreed to, she could scarcely repress the cry that rose to her lips at the sight of his haggard face. He looked as though long years had passed over his head in the space of as many hours.

He noticed, too, even through the thick grey

veil she wore to conceal them, how red and tear-swollen poor Dora's eyes were!

And the great grief in the heart of each for one object brought them nearer together in a bond of sympathy which would last till death.

Neither spoke during the entire journey; each respected the silent grief of the other.

Only once Ralph turned to Dora, and that was to mention that he had telegraphed on to Nelly that he was coming with a nice companion for her, and that she would be expecting them, and to exact of Dora a promise that she would not mention their mutual loss, which they must both keep buried from the sight of the world down deep in their hearts.

"I could not speak of my lost darling—not even to you, Dora," he said, huskily. "I could not endure the pain of it."

How cruel is fate oftentimes! How little either of them dreamed that Vesta, whom they mourned as lost, was at that moment in London seeking employment, and that it was some other beautiful, forlorn young creature who had come from the great metropolis, seeking work, and who, because of her failure to secure it, sought rest and peace in the waters of the river. Want and woe could not follow her across the dark threshold of death.

As the carriage dashed up to the house they both saw a sweet, wistful face pressed close against the window-pane,

The shadow of a smile lingered for a moment on Ralph Stoddart's grave, handsome face.

"It is Nelly!" he said.

The next moment a fair young girl limped out to the brown-stone steps to meet them, and the next instant she was folded close in her dear brother's strong arms.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NELLY STODDART turned from her brother to meet the sad-faced shrinking girl standing by his side.

"I am sure I shall like you, Miss Saville," she said, turning a pair of large, dark, luminous eyes towards the stranger.

The glance and those dark eyes gazing on her so earnestly brought Vesta to her mind at once, and she was obliged to turn her head quickly away to hide her tears.

At the first glance Miss Nelly looked like a child, she was so petite; but when she spoke, and her small pale face lighted up, she looked nearer her age—twenty.

Nelly found her brother seated in the library late that night with his head bowed on his hands, sighing so deeply—it was almost a moan—that broke from his lips.

Suddenly he felt a pair of white arms steal softly around his neck, and a soft cheek was laid against his own.

"Ralph, dear," said a sweet voice that was very caressing in its tone, "tell Nelly what grieves you. You are in deep trouble, brother; make a confidante of Nelly!"

"It is only your fancy, little sister," he answered, trying to assume a careless demeanour.

"You are in great trouble, dear," she declared. "There is a trace of tears on your face, and it is a very great grief indeed that can bring tears to the eyes of a strong man like yourself, and your face bears every evidence of intense suffering. I was shocked when my eyes first fell upon you as you stepped from the carriage. I could hardly believe it was my handsome brother Ralph. And do you know what I think, too?" she cried, with a merry twinkle in her dark eyes.

"No!" he said, dejectedly, scarcely hearing what it was.

"I think that you and Miss Saville were lovers and that you have become estranged—and—and both regret it, though you are too proud to say so to each other. Every time I have come suddenly upon Miss Saville this afternoon I have found her sobbing as though

her heart were breaking, and sighing just as you were doing a moment since, and so I put this and that together, forming my own conclusion."

"You are wrong—all wrong, Nelly," cried Ralph, starting from his chair and walking very excitedly up and down the room. "Get that thought out of your mind at once. I have met Miss Saville a few times, but we were never more than friends—scarcely that. I could not love any woman on the face of the earth. You pain me deeply by even thinking of such an event in connection with me. Never hint such a thought to Miss Saville, I beg of you, for you would grieve her as deeply as you have grieved me, Nelly."

"You are a genuine dissembler, brother Ralph!" cried the girl, shaking a very slim, dainty finger at him. "I know you well, you see!"

"You must believe that I speak the truth, Nelly," he cried, in a tone so full of anguish it startled the girl. "Dora is nothing to me—nor has she ever been. We have never been lovers."

"I do not know whether I ought to believe brother Ralph or not about never having been Miss Saville's lover," thought Nelly, as she tossed restlessly on her pillow that night. "It looks very—very suspicious to see both of them so wretched, and she seems to avoid him on every occasion when it is possible. Now that goes to prove that they have quarrelled. If I thought it were really true I would make every endeavour to reunite them. It must be awful for lovers who really love each other very much to part and go their separate ways. Yes, I am sure they are lovers, and have parted. I wish they would make it up and—and—marry, for Saville is such a sweet girl, and poor Ralph is so very wretched," and Nelly could not help but think of the lines she had read somewhere:—

"How strange it seems, that law of Heaven's ordaining,

That not a rose should bloom without a thorn; And when the cup of joy we would be draining, Then from our lips so oft 'tis rudely torn!

In thy dear eyes long since I did discover

The beacon light of loving constancy; Yet we must part, our happy dream is over;

Farewell, farewell, dear love! 'twas not to be!

"Low moans the wind; the threatening heavens lower,

O'er moor and mountain swift the storm-wrack flies;

Sad nature's tears fall fast, a pitying shower, And dark as night the path before me lies;

Yet on it leads to winter or fair weather;

Of thee, dear love, I still shall think of thee! Heaven's will be done! our happy dream is over!

Farewell, farewell, dear love! 'twas not to be!"

Nelly had quite an original plan of her own. She meant to repeat those words to Dora, and if she flushed or turned pale she would know that they had struck home.

It was a very pretty scheme; but ah, me, how oft

"The best laid plan of mice and man Aft gang aglee."

At the breakfast-table the next morning Ralph announced that he was going away, adding that if it were not for Nelly he would leave the country altogether and live abroad.

She saw Miss Saville raise her eyes and look earnestly into his face, but he did not look at her; instead he looked sadly out of the window, and the look of pain on his haggard face grieved Nelly wofully.

"Supposing that I shall not consent to lose you, Ralph?" she said, quickly.

"It will only be a little while, dear," he said and she heard him murmur under his breath that he must try to "live and learn to forget."

Despite Nelly's pleadings he was resolved

to go for a little while, but he promised faithfully to return in a fortnight, and remain home for a long stay.

Ralph went southward, and he haunted the spot like a shadow where he believed poor Vesta had lost her sweet young life.

Passers-by saw him there early and late, and they began to speculate what took him there, and why the sad blue eyes were always gazing so steadfastly into the waves.

"Poor little Vesta, the daintily-bred girl searching for work!"

The thought almost drove him to despair.

He spent a little fortune in attempting to recover the body, but it was all useless, they told him.

He returned to Nelly a broken-hearted man.

Dora's heart bled for him, as she looked and saw the story of his grief written in his face. She quite believed the intense silent suffering would kill him.

He liked to take long walks with Dora, and talk to her about their lost darling. Her sympathy was a great balm to his torn heart.

He liked to talk of those halcyon days he had spent with Vesta when she was at boarding school; how his heart had gone out to her at first sight; of the emotions that filled his heart when he clasped her in his arms, as they faced death together that afternoon at the tennis grounds when the dam above the village broke.

"Ah! those were happy days, Dora," he sighed. "I—I would give my life to live them over again."

"You must try to forget her," Dora would say, very gently and pityingly. "Thinking of her only stabs your heart afresh."

He would shake his head with a desolate sigh.

"You might as well tell the winds from Heaven not to blow as to tell me not to think of her," he would answer. "Why, there is not a moment in the day that her memory is not before me. Ay, even in my dreams I see her face and hear her voice. There are some men who love lightly, but I—ah, I loved with the whole passionate strength of my nature! When I see a beautiful, dark-eyed girl that in any way resembles her, I think of my darling. When I see a happy lover and his sweethearts I think of her."

Dora thought of the story of the mad lover who had lost his reason at the death-bed of the girl he loved, and as she thought about it she was greatly troubled about Ralph.

Her own grief at the supposed death of Vesta had been pitiful, but his was terrible, and each day that passed seemed to plunge him in more poignant woe. What would be the end, she wondered? And when he fell ill, and the doctors pronounced his affliction brain fever, she was not surprised. Nelly was beside herself with grief—utterly prostrated.

(To be continued.)

WITHIN AN ACE.

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An ideal day, such as June sometimes gives us as a foretaste of Paradise. The air was sweet with the perfume of roses, and the lovely lawns and gardens smiled in loving gratitude of nature's bounty.

The church bells added the final touch of enchantment to the perfect morning, and as Annie Hare walked beside her husband she was thinking to herself.—

"Some day in the far distant future I shall die, and when I lift up my eyes in Paradise it will be like this; for I am happy—quite happy—and happiness is Heaven."

This was a great truth that little Mrs. Hare realised just then, but she didn't know fatal to happiness it is to realise it.

And even in that moment she sighed unconsciously, for on the other side of her hus-

band walked her dear friend, Kate Barber, and she was a beautiful woman—a very beautiful woman. Mary thought, with a twinge of pain, for Ned Hare's gaze was fastened on her radiant face; and though his wife had spoken to him twice, he had not even heard the sound of her voice.

Annie sighed, and the brightness of the day seemed for a moment clouded; but almost instantly she dismissed what she felt to be a painful feeling, and the sky was soon as fair and lovely as before.

Kate was beautiful, of course, and she was her dearest and most intimate friend, and of course Ned admired her. Why not? Didn't she admire her, too, and didn't Ned always admire every one she admired?

She didn't repeat her remark—it had been of no consequence, anyway—and as the bell had now ceased, she even hastened her steps, and was the first to enter the church.

She hastened on to their pew, went forward into the furthest corner, and having reverently knelt a minute, took up the prayer-book and found the lesson for the day, and had it all ready when Kate entered.

Of course Miss Barber came in first, as Ned held the door open for her, and, as Annie was already there, sat down beside her.

Of course this brought her next to Ned, and if Mrs. Hare noticed this fact and coupled it with similar accidents which had put her aside, and brought her dearest friend next to Mr. Hare on all occasions when they went out together, she was not going to let such a trivial thing affect her feelings, or even her thoughts.

Her fresh young voice joined the choir when the hymn was given; and when Miss Barber's full contralto almost drowned every other voice in the church, it was with quite a little thrill of triumph, as well as admiration, that Annie looked proudly and lovingly towards her friend's glowing and beautiful face.

Ned Hare was a young artist, and they were spending the summer in a rather tumble-down old house in the country belonging to a rich friend who had been so long out of England that his property was going to ruin.

Ned, who was not any more wealthy than young artists usually are, had been delighted with the opportunity of such a home for the summer; and Annie, who could do a little of everything, and rather prided herself on her powers as a housekeeper, had brought no servant with her, and had succeeded so well that she even wrote pages of triumph to her dearest friend, describing the romance and charm of the rambling old house, and descanting on her own achievements as housewife, always ending by entreaties to her dearest Kate to come and spend a part of the summer with her, and judge for herself of the wonderful powers she had developed in housekeeping.

Kate came. She was enchanted. She went into raptures over everything. She praised Annie's cooking. She enjoyed the lovely hammock between the cherry trees in the garden; she ate the strawberries; she declared that she had never known the full bliss of tea drinking till she had been served in Ned's pet Seville cup on the cool verandah.

She sat in the studio for hours while Ned made a dozen charming sketches of her, and Annie nearly killed herself doing all the work of the house—for it was useless to deny it, there was just twice as much to do since darling Kate had come; and it dear Ned had not been the best and most considerate boy in the world, she would have been very much at a loss for time enough to entertain this dear and cherished friend.

But they were very good, both of them, and just entertained each other for hours and hours, while she dusted and swept, or cooked the dinner or made the pudding, and had a dozen other fruitful ways of using up the time such as no housekeeper needs to be reminded of.

And on this day, too, soon as church was over, Annie excused herself on going ahead,

and, on "hospitable thoughts intent," was home nearly an hour before her friend and husband, and when these loiterers arrived dinner was already on the table and waiting for them.

After dinner there was a cake to make for tea, and fresh strawberries to pick, and the dinner china to clear away; and when the leisure hour of the evening at last arrived Annie Hare drew a long sigh of relief and bent her steps towards the library, for she knew that Ned and Kate were there.

For some time she had heard the notes of the organ, and occasionally Miss Barber's magnificent voice, in unison with the deep and fervent tones of the instrument.

She knew that it was Ned's favourite music, and no wonder—her soul was calmed and elevated by the sound, and she trod so softly, so gently, that no one heard her approach.

There was no light in the library; the summer twilight filled the room, and the music had ceased, but Annie heard the murmur of low voices, and as she drew nearer she heard the words distinctly,—

"Ah, Kate, what an inspiration you are to an artist! Not alone your exquisite beauty, which I could gaze on for ever, and never tire of putting on canvas, if I could only do justice to it! But the melody of your voice, the intense and glowing soul that breathes from your exquisite eyes—it is a privilege even to look at you! How can I thank you for the words you bestow in calling me your friend?"

"Dear Ned! You are a sad flatterer, I fear!" murmured Kate, as she playfully put out her hand and touched her finger to his lips.

He caught her hand in both of his and kissed it passionately.

And Annie drew back into the dusk, and, almost stifling with emotion, half staggered from the room, out into the dark hall and away to the loneliness of her own room.

He loved Kate—her beautiful, magnificent friend! How could it be otherwise? He was an artist—beauty was the god he worshipped. He was not even to blame—nature had made him so.

The lark must sing; the rose must lavish her perfume; he must love the beauty he adored! Oh, what would she do? What could she do? Would to Heaven she had never been born, or had never seen Ned Hare, or that he had never seen Kate!

And then a sword of flame seemed to pierce her to the heart, and she groaned aloud in torture, for she was wildly, madly jealous, and she wished only to die and be at rest, for here was a gentle heart—poor little Annie!—and she could not hate either the man she loved or the woman who had, perhaps without intending it, robbed her of him.

How long she lay there in darkness and misery Annie Hare never knew; but the dusk grew to black darkness, and the air seemed very close and still, and horribly hot.

She rose, feeling almost suffocated, and pushed open the French window that led to the verandah; and hardly conscious what she was doing, she went out, round the verandah and down the steps leading to the garden.

There the storm came upon her, which she had not been aware of, for the stifling heat had gathered all its subtle forces, and in a moment the sky was blazing with vivid streams of lightning, the thunder roared and bellowed, and presently the clouds opened and the flood poured down all its reservoir of waters.

Annie stood still, frightened, and if she was aware of any connected thought, it was a wish that the lightning might strike her and remove her out of Ned's way, for now he must hate her—her delicate little pale face and slender figure, that he used to think so dainty and *mignon*. How unlovely and common she must seem now beside her radiant friend!

Instead of turning towards the house she ran away from it—away into the dreadful storm, the teeming rain and the roaring

thunder and the blinding lightning, that wouldn't even kill her, she was so small and insignificant.

And then, above all the tumult of the storm, she suddenly heard a voice calling her,—

"Annie, my darling, my sweet little girl! Where are you?"

She stopped suddenly, as if the lightning had struck her. She cried out with all her strength,—

"Ned! Ned! I am here!"

For there was a tone in her husband's voice that belonged to her alone—a tone that had not been there when he spoke to the beautiful Miss Barber; and Annie knew, as if a voice from Heaven had spoken, that though the artist might admire the lovely woman and rave over her beauty, and wish a thousand times to paint her face on canvas, the man loved the little pale woman he called wife, and every fibre in her poor little jealous heart thrilled with triumph at the thought.

"Ned! Ned! I am here!" she called again.

And as the whole sky seemed suddenly on fire, he saw the drenched white figure staggering towards him, and, with a cry of horror, sprang forward to catch her in his arms at the moment she seemed to fall.

Again the leaping lightning flamed across the sky, the thunder shook the very ground beneath his feet, and clasping her close to his heart, he struggled towards the house, while endearing words were poured into her unconscious ears.

"Have you found her? Where was she? What possessed her to go out in this storm? Oh, I hope she isn't hurt!"

Miss Barber is full of anxiety and sympathy, but Ned put her aside almost rudely, and carried Annie into her room, where he soon succeeded in recovering her, for she had only fainted.

"And you do love me, then, dear Ned?" she said, as he took off her drenched shoes and stockings.

"Of course I love you, little goose! though you have nearly frightened me to death. Quick, here's a dry wrapper, and all the rest of the dry clothes you need! What a thing to do! What on earth took you out in the storm? For Heaven's sake, be quick! You'll have your death from this wetting!"

"But Kate—Miss Barber—"

"Confound Miss Barber! Where will I find your slippers, Annie, dear?"

"But she's so beautiful, Ned, and, then, you kissed her hand, and I thought you were surely in love with her—"

"Good heavens! was that why you went out in the rain? Oh, Annie, my little sweet-heart, I wouldn't give one look out of your eyes for all the beauties in the whole world, though I appreciate them as models, of course, and your friend has a magnificent head and face, as a model. But who could imagine a little puss like you being jealous of an artist's model?"

"Hush—you impudent fellow! Kate would be furious. An artist's model! But I forgive you, dear, this once, since I really have found your heart. But I think I prefer you not to kiss your models after this—"

"I never kissed her!"

"I saw you and heard you kiss her hand."

"A mere bit of gallantry!" exclaimed the artist, blushing, however, and looking rather foolish, as Miss Barber appeared at the door to inquire for Annie.

"Did she hear me, I wonder?" thought Ned. "She is beautiful, and no mistake; but there's a long step between admiration and love."

But Miss Barber sat no more alone with Ned Hare in the studio. She lost all interest in the rambling old house; the country soon began to bore her; and after yawning away a few more days she returned to town, and then to the seaside; and Annie's friendship for the beautiful "model" gradually declined, till it died out into indifference and final forgetfulness.

THE MYSTERY OF LONE HALL.

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CHAPTER XXV.

"MURDER! MURDER! MURDER!"

I STAGGERED back against the wall, as if I had been struck. Colonel Mordaunt was in the house, hiding from us, and he had never been away! The conviction flashed through my mind, as I recollect the opening of the library door, and his sudden appearance on the ice. But even if he had deceived me in this useless, unwarrantable manner, what was he doing now? what was happening to his child on the other side of the iron door?

All my confidence in him vanished in a moment; every tale that I had heard against him, every insinuation, came back to my mind. He was said to have murdered his wife; he might even now be murdering his child. Though no one had told me so, he was suffering from homicidal mania, and this was why they had urged me to leave Lone Hall! Effie was to be the victim tonight, and I perhaps to-morrow! Dr. Good-enough, for some object of his own, would not stop him. He would look on at anything, however dreadful, with the same peculiar smile as he would give to a joke. Perhaps he meant to step into the poor girl's shoes, and have Lone Hall when we all cleared out.

I verily believe I was half delirious, for nothing seemed too horrible to be imagined. I ran round the gallery, and thumped on the iron door with all my might, resolved to save Effie if I could. I was so beside myself with fear that I had no thoughts for my own appearance, with my hair streaming down my back, my loose dressing-gown, and my bare feet. I felt like a mother must when deprived of her baby, callous to all thought of personal pain or danger. My hands, though black and blue from my efforts, made no impression on that solid door; so I stooped my head, and, reckless of all consequences, put my lips to the key-hole and shouted through it,—

"Where's Effie! What are you doing to her?"

I waited, half frightened by the sound of my own voice in the stillness, and then steps came quickly down the passage; a key was turned in the lock, and Colonel Mordaunt came out, and shut the door behind him.

He looked so stern, so composed, and so utterly sad, that all my wild suspicions died that instant.

"Miss Trevor, what are you doing here?" His voice was cold, his manner haughty, as if he thought I had been officiously interfering in his private affairs.

My eyes fell before his.

"I saw you take Effie, and I did not know what you were going to do with her."

"You thought I couldn't be trusted with my own child. Was that it?" in cold scorn.

"It seemed so strange. I was frightened, twisting my fingers in and out nervously. I could not understand."

"You do not understand it now, and you never will; but you might have had some sort of consideration for my feelings, and not have tried to rouse the house with your cries. I should have thought that you could trust me, but evidently Basil Conyers has converted you."

"No, no!" I cried passionately, out to the heart; and yet a minute before I had thought him a murderer!

"Don't waste your breath on denials. I can't wait to hear them, and your actions speak for themselves; but if you have a spark of womanly mercy in your composition you'll be sorry for what you've thought to-night."

I met his eyes once, stern and severe in their passionate scorn, and then, dumb with pain and bitter humiliation, crept back to my room.

He had read the base thought in my heart, and nothing could ever make him forget it.

Crushed and utterly miserable, I lay awake sobbing. I heard his step along the passage, but I had no longer any fears about Effie, so did not stir. I kept saying to myself that I must go away. I could not stay another day. I would pack my trunks directly after breakfast.

It was impossible for Colonel Mordaunt and me to meet again after what had passed. He would feel outraged by the sight of me. I must get to Brettonby as soon as I could, and write to my parents, to warn them that I was coming to Barmer.

I came down to breakfast full of my resolve, but had no one to tell it to except Miss Mordaunt, and with an aching head it is not agreeable to shout. Effie was late, and looked very heavy about the eyes. There was an inertness in her walk, which struck me particularly, as lately there had been so much more life in her movements; but all these symptoms were probably owing to the narcotic she had unconsciously taken the night before.

"Oh dear! I wonder when papa is coming back," she said with an impatient sigh, as she began her breakfast in a listless manner.

"The Colonel is back, miss," answered Jervis from the sideboard, where he was cutting the ham. "He breakfasted early with the doctor, and went out."

"Oh why didn't Alice tell me? Where has he gone? Do you think he is on the ice?"

"No; he's not there. Don't you fidget about him, miss. He won't be far off."

"When he comes in, Effie, you had better ask him about this dance at Mrs. Porter's, as I suppose you'll want a new dress."

"Yes, I've got nothing to wear. We won't skate to-day, will we?" her eyes brightening. "He might come in when we were out."

I was glad now to skate, because I felt desperately ill; but I had resolved to make the effort if Effie wished it. I feel in duty bound to do everything to please her, and now that I'm going away so soon I am anxious to leave the nicest possible impression behind.

She will regret me, I know; andales! alas! I grow fonder of her every day. We read French and German together, in spite of my poor head. There was no chance of its getting better, when my heart was upset by every step that crossed the hall, and I was thankful to throw myself on the sofa when the gong sounded for luncheon.

To meet him was impossible in the present state of my nerves. I believe I should have cried or done something foolish, so I remained where I was, and declined all refreshments.

If I hadn't felt so dreadfully cold I daresay I should have gone to sleep, but I had never been warm since last night. Walking about with bare feet in the small hours of the night is not the way to improve the temperature or the health, unless you have the constitution of a rhinoceros.

Later in the afternoon I came to the conclusion that I should never feel better till I had taken a quick walk to circulate my blood; also I was anxious to know how Eliza Perry was.

Colonel Mordaunt sent me a glass of wine by Jervis. This is all the notice he has taken of my existence; but Effie tells me that he is very busy. I expect that he will be always too busy to come near me, and I shall have to go away, if for no other reason than not to keep him away from his own table.

Effie went out in the brougham with her great-aunt, and I started for my walk with a basket on my arm. My legs shook under me, but I was determined not to be bested.

As I came near the river I caught sight of some of our friends in the distance; but I hurried across the bridge, and hoped they would not see me, not feeling in the least inclined for their cheerful conversation.

The events of last night seem like a dream, and now that it is daylight I can scarcely credit the panic I was in.

I had gone further than Mr. Conyers for five wretched minutes at least. I had suspected Colonel Mordaunt of the intention

to kill his daughter, and I don't believe such an idea had ever entered his brother-in-law's mind.

Colonel Mordaunt, who loved his child better than his own life! How could I have ever worked myself into such a frenzy as to suspect him? I must have been mad—mad as any poor lunatic pacing up and down the cells at Bedlam. He would never forgive me! It was not in human nature that he should.

With a sigh I tapped at Mrs. Brookes's door, and asked after the patient. She shook her head, and said,—

"She has been that bad that I've been most afraid to stay in the house with her."

"But you wouldn't leave her to die alone?"

"No, I'd ha' watched her die with pleasure, but it's the talkin' that worries my nerves. Just you hearken a bit to what she's a sayin'. I can't make it out exactly, but it makes my blood run cold, it do."

I followed her inside the room where I had last seen Eliza Perry. She was sitting up in bed, her face looking emaciated and absolutely revolting in the malevolence of its expression, as her eyes roved from side to side.

There was no curtain to the bed, but a shepherd's plaid shawl was hung up on a hook in the ceiling, and secured to the back of a chair, in order to shut out the draught from an old-fashioned diamond-paneled window.

The walls were clean and recently white-washed, and the furniture was neat, but plain. The floor was carpetless, but there was a large mat by the side of the bedstead, of Mrs. Brookes's own manufacture. To add to the comfortless appearance of the room there was a stove, with no fire in it.

I was just going to remark on this, when Eliza Perry pointed to me, with a long, bony finger, and cried,—

"No one shall shut my mouth. I'll cry murder! murder! murder! as long as I've the breath to do it. Bury her quick, cover her up, put her in the coffin! Oh, yes, no one shall help! Lock the door—the door—the door! Hush! Whisper—whisper—it's a murder! I'll be quick and tell them!" talking faster and faster still I could scarcely catch the words, though I listened in breathless horror. Who could it be? Had some one really been done to death? or was it a creation of her own delirious brain?

"I never stole it. She gave it me, poor dear, because I liked to be fine. No, sir," turning rapidly round, and fixing her eyes on a corner of the room with such intensity, as if she really were addressing some person visible to her eyes, though not to ours, "it's money I want—money. I'll pull you down in your pride, and tell them all how Percival Mordaunt killed his— Ha, ha, ha! You never thought I knew it. Hush! I'll creep—creep—creep—they are doing it now," her voice sank to an unnatural whisper. She put her finger to her lips, and nodded slyly, "Don't let her make a noise—no blood—hold her down. Eliza knows!"

I caught hold of Mrs. Brookes, and stumbled back into the passage.

"It is all nonsense," I said, with what confidence I could muster. "Horrible nonsense! People always rave like that in typhus fever, and imagine all sorts of crime. Don't let anyone come near her. It would be so sad if it spread through the village—the fever I mean!"

"But, miss, the doctor never told me it was catching!" looking at me, quite aghast.

"Didn't he? How extraordinary! Tell Mr. Conyers not to come. I—think he is nervous," hurriedly depositing the contents of my basket on a table in the kitchen.

"Thank you, miss, kindly. Ain't it odd?" lowering her voice to a mysterious undertone. "How she do rail at the Colonel?"

"It's always the way. They fix on the best people always—the very best," I repeated with emphasis; and then I bade her goodbye, and hurried away, feeling mad to get away from the sound of that voice upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"A SKATING FRIEND!"

The woman's hateful voice pursued me on the way. I had to pass through a wood before I got to the bridge, and the wind in the pine-tops seemed to murmur, "Murder, murder, murder!" as I went along, shivering with cold and horror. What did all mean? Why should the Colonel's name always be mixed up with some most dreadful story? If it had been someone else—Mr. Conyers, for instance—I should certainly have thought that there must have been a grain of truth at the bottom of it; but I hurried on, determined to make up for my few minutes' want of faith by believing in him entirely from beginning to end.

It was too bad that, when I had made such an effort to come out and refresh myself, my nerves should be upset again by this horrible woman. If Mrs. Brookes didn't take care she would poison the ears of all the servants. Uneducated people who have nothing to think of beyond their neighbours' doings are always so prone to believe the worst of them, and irreparable injury might be done by one woman's tongue.

I trembled to think what would be the consequences if Mr. Conyers happened to call again at Brookes's cottage; and with a wild desire to save Colonel Mordaunt at any price, I fiercely wished that Eliza Perry would die. I was thinking so deeply that I shrieked aloud, when a form suddenly stood in front of me, and blocked the narrow path.

"A thousand pardons. I've been nearly frozen waiting for you, and had just concluded you had gone round another way."

"I wish I had," I said, persistently, angry with Major Baget, and with myself as well. As far as I could see in the dark he looked much abashed.

"If you wish it I'll slope; but you've got a basket," eagerly catching hold of it. "Let me carry it for you?"

"In order that you may run away with it?"

"If I'm of use perhaps you will let me stay?" "This wood is not mine, so you can stay in it as long as you like."

"That will be as long as you are in it. Why weren't you on the ice to-day?"

"Because I felt inclined to remain at home," stiffly; because I wished to be extra proper in the dusk, and I meant to get rid of him in a moment.

"Very cruel of you. The amount of bad language used in consequence was fearful. What became of Miss Mordaunt?"

"She stayed at home because her father had come back."

"He must be a most fascinating man."

"Because his only child is fond of him?"

"You stayed at home as well," quickly.

"Yes, until a bad headache and a furious temper drove me out. Romantic reasons, weren't they?"

"You are not looking well," staring at me with his soft dark eyes.

"That is a comfort to my mind. When I feel ill I like to look ill."

"But, seriously, are you bad? I believe you are tired to death. Take my arm."

I felt ready to drop; but I shook my head, and walked on steadily as I could.

"Miss Trevor, this is the last day of skating. When and how shall we meet in the future?" bending down very low.

"I don't suppose we shall meet at all," compositely. "Our acquaintance came with the ice, and when the ice is gone that will go with it."

We had reached the bridge, and as I was so very tired I waited a moment, and leant against the balustrade.

There were pools of water here and there on the surface of the ice, and all the skaters had gone home.

Perfect silence reigned. A mist hung about the rushes, tinged by a ray of glory from the west, where the sun was sinking.

"It will go, you think, and leave no mark behind?" Major Bagot burst out with suppressed excitement. "And Reading and I will be content with the humdrum life in Winchester, and forget all this! Do you really think we are jelly-fish, and not made of flesh and blood at all?"

"When a thing is inevitable I think it is best to be resigned."

"But we might meet a hundred times a week if you only cared," with reproachful eyes. "Good-bye."

"Let me go home with you to the door?" entreatingly.

"Not for the world."

"Which is the shortest way to the high-road, then, for Reading is waiting for me somewhere about in the cart?"

"I should think the poor horse was frozen. Follow this path by the river until you reach a small gate in the wall."

"Miss Trevor," holding my hand, and looking down into my face, "don't you care one bit if you don't see either of us again?"

"Not a bit," I said, gravely; but my treacherous lips betrayed me into a smile, and the next moment he bent his head and kissed my hand.

I snatched it from him in fury, and ran away with crimson cheeks, only to find myself face to face with Colonel Mordaunt! His eyes looked beyond me at the man behind, whom I had fondly fancied was out of sight.

"Your basket, Miss Trevor," said Major Bagot's voice, and I was obliged to turn round and take it from his hand. I should like to have thrown it at his head!

"Would you introduce me to Colonel Mordaunt?" making a random shot at his identity.

I did under protest, and then without a word left them; but I heard the voice which has a richer, fuller tone than any other say, in answer to some speech of the Major's,—

"Any friend of Miss Trevor's is always welcome at Lone Hall."

My heart was filled with bitterness. Guildford Mayhew had failed, so now he was glad to seize upon new chance of getting rid of me. He need not trouble himself. I have made up my mind to go, but I will not marry anybody. I used to have day-dreams like any other girl; but now the mere thought of matrimony sickens me.

I concluded, of course, Colonel Mordaunt would join me, and my heart beat fast at the thoughts of what he would say to me. I had read displeasure in his face, and did not know whether it was because of last night or Major Bagot.

I walked fast because I did not wish to seem to be expecting him, but I kept my ears open, and presently heard the click of a gate.

Instead of being behind me he had hurried on ahead by a different path on purpose to avoid me, and was now disappearing through a gate in the wall of Jervis's private garden!

Then my courage and my strength both seemed to fail me, and I could scarcely drag myself along the rest of the way.

We found him and Dr. Goodenough in the dining-room when we came in to dinner, and for a moment the room seemed to be going round with me.

The doctor came forward and shook hands, saying with his usual queer smile,—

"I shall prescribe for you to-night, Miss Trevor. Early to bed, and a composing draught when you get there."

I wondered if he wanted to persuade me that I had been walking in my sleep the night before, and that all that I had seen was nothing but a dream. I wish to Heaven it were!

Colonel Mordaunt bowed, and said, simply,—

"We have met before."

"Where, papa? I thought poor Miss Trevor had not seen you at all!" said Effie, with the utmost naïveté.

Sae felt it would be a great loss for anyone,

and she saw no reason why she shouldn't say so.

In some things she is as simple as a child of twelve.

I waited for his answer, but he did not look at me when he gave it.

"Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Trevor at the bridge, but not alone, Effie. One of your skating friends was with her."

"Ah! Major Bagot, of course!" with a smile across the table at me, for which I could almost have hated her, poor little innocent thing!

"Ah! has it come to that?" said her father, slowly, whilst my maddening cheeks grew crimson.

He paused, helped himself to some wild fowl, and went on,—

"Rather late in the day he asked permission to come here, having haunted the place on and off for the last month."

"And what did you say to him, papa?" bending forward with unusual eagerness.

"I told him to come by all means. What was the use of saying no when he meant to come, whether I wished it or not? He said something about my not having called at the barracks, didn't he?" turning to me.

"Yes."

"I never call anywhere, but next time I go into Winchester I'll leave a card if I can remember it. Bagot seems a reasonably fellow. And his special friend, Reading, what is he like?"

"Very nice, and very kind. He gave me lovely flowers on my birthday. Oh, papa! why didn't you come home for it?" as the regret suddenly passed through her mind, and made her forget everything else.

How little she guessed that he was there in that very house, and had even held her in his arms!

His face softened.

"I thought of you, child; but I was kept away by necessity. By-the-bye," looking round at the clock, "how slow Jervis is! Effie, do you think it beneath your dignity to change the plates?"

"I'll do it, papa," and she ran to the side-board.

I stood up, but Colonel Mordaunt called out,—

"Don't stir, Miss Trevor," in a manner that sent me back into my chair at once.

He tried to make a joke of it all, as he and Effie handed the sweets, but I saw that there was some grave anxiety in the background, and hurried over my fragment of cake-pudding in order not to keep him any longer than necessary.

Dr. Goodenough, in the midst of explaining a new theory about germs, suddenly got up from his chair, saying he had forgotten his handkerchief, and left the room.

A volcanic sigh from Miss Mordaunt.

"Mrs. Jervis again, I suppose! Next time, for goodness' sake, have a butler without a wife."

"There won't be a next time," the Colonel said with the utmost weariness in his tone. "I hope Jervis will last me out."

She did not hear him, but I did, and took it as a prayer for an early death. The Colonel was only thirty-nine, without a thread of silver in his close-cropped hair, and with all the vigour and fire of youth about him still; whilst his faithful servant, who had worn himself out in the service of the Mordants, was old beyond his years, and they were seventy. And yet now, in the prime of life, the younger wished to die before the elder, because of the secret burden which was too much for mind and heart!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THOSE TWO BAD BOYS."

EFFIE is to have a new dress, and this afternoon, as Miss Mordaunt does not desire to make use of the brougham, we are to drive into Winchester to order it. There is a capital

dressmaker in the town, patronised by some of the bear-dressed people in the country, and it seems only right that her first society frock should come from the hands of the local celebrity. It is a frock, not a gown, for she is not to "come out" at the Porters; indeed, I don't see any chance of her coming out at all, unless Flo can get over the Colonel. Even now he does not say she may go to this dance, and actually intends to reserve his final decision until Christmas Eve. I suppose there is some good reason for his hesitation, but it seems rather thoughtless to the poor girl. It is not as bad for Effie as for some girls, for I have known a good many who are always in a state of excitement as soon as an invitation comes into the house; but still it must be hard on her.

Life is quite hateful to me at present, for Colonel Mordaunt never speaks to me unless he can't help it. If he dines with us, which is not very often, he turns me over to the doctor, who seems bent on improving my mind. We discuss all sorts of topics, and he seems to be up in every subject. When he speaks of the most abstruse theories he always talks of them with confidence, as if he had thought them out thoroughly.

A wonderfully clever man, with a history of his own, which is intended for no one else's ear. You can see that in the quick movement of his eyes, which dart from person to person, as if to find out what everyone is thinking of him, and by the firmly closed mouth, which is not likely to let out anything its owner wants to keep to himself.

He gives you the idea of knowing everything before you speak, and of only asking about one's pursuits and interests out of politeness, his curiosity being dwarfed by his superior knowledge.

I often speculate as to why he is here. Sometimes I think the Colonel has some disease which is wearing his life away, for every day he seems to be paler, sadder, and more worn. He is quite a different man to what he was when I first came. Then he used to spend most of the day in riding or fishing; and, later on, I used often to see him from the window striding over the grass, with his gun over his shoulder, two dogs at heel, and a keeper following.

Now, he rarely stirs from the house, although game is very plentiful, and for hours together disappears behind the closed door of the library.

Dr. Goodenough is almost always with him, and they never spend the evening in the drawing room, as they used to do.

It is a very curious feeling to be under the same roof with two men whose lives are entirely apart from mine. Their hopes and fears and anxieties are all unknown to me. When I see them listening for sound I find myself listening too. Sometimes I think I catch a distant noise of tapping, and then one of them is sure to slip out of the room. Thank goodness, Mrs. Jervis has indulged in no more alarming shrieks. Perhaps she is ill—dying, and that is why Jervis creeps about like a ghost.

Effie told him that she was going to a dance on Christmas Eve, and the sour old fellow looked exactly as if he grudged her the pleasure.

"This is no time for dancing, and suchlike goings on. Take my advice, miss, and stay at home, or maybe you'll be sorry some day."

"She won't be anything of the sort," I said, impatiently. "Christmas ought to be a happy time for all of us, and Miss Effie is just at the age to enjoy it."

"Very well, miss. Of course you know better than me," moving off, with a coal-scuttle in his hand.

He looked as if he had scarcely the strength to hold it, and I forgot my anger in compassion.

"Couldn't some of the stable-boys do that heavy work for you? They haven't enough, and you have too much."

A sort of scared look came over his face, as



(EFFIE SNATCHED AWAY HER HAND, ONLY TO FIND HERSELF FACE TO FACE WITH COLONEL MORDAUNT !)

if I were going to introduce a crowd of boys into the house against his will.

'We don't want any of 'em here. No, no. As long as I've strength to keep on my legs we won't have no strangers in the house,' and he shuffled away as briskly as he could, as if to show he was equal to any boy, though seventy years of age.

There is something very pathetic in old age trying to do the same amount of work as the young and vigorous—failing eyes and failing knees made up for by a willing spirit, and the love of a faithful servant.

We drove into Winchester, put up the brougham, and walked down to Madame Michel's. I was quite as much interested in Effie's dress as she was, and determined that her father should approve of my taste. It was to be white tulle, covered with ohenille spots, which I imagined would make her look like a snowdrop emerging from a snowstorm. Madame Michel approved of the idea, and made various suggestions as to the make, which would have destroyed all chance of simplicity, so I quietly ignored them—a dangerous experiment with a dressmaker; but I think she must have been impressed by our toilette, for she succumbed at once.

Effie had on a dark green cloth Newmarket, edged with sable, and I a brown plush one, which my dear father gave me on my last birthday, with a toque to match, so that we did not look like country bumpkins. I quite enjoyed a day's shopping, and I am afraid I was rather extravagant; but, then I had not been in a shop for months. There were Christmas presents to be got for the Jervises, a spectacle-case for Aunt Euphemia, who had just dropped hers into the fire, and nothing for Colonel Mordaunt.

There was a little pencil-case which would just have suited him—a bear climbing up a ragged staff, in solid silver. I bought it, and a pair of queer-looking silver bangles, which I destined for Effie, but the pencil-case will

probably find its way over the water to one who has never rebuffed me.

As it was bitterly cold and very damp we went into Gregory's for a hot cup of coffee before returning home. We were just enjoying it when those "two bad boys," as Mrs. Porter calls them, came in. What for I do not know, because they asked for nothing, and made straight for us. Of course they were fervent in their expressions of delight; but I was cold as an iceberg to Major Bagot, and told Effie we must go at once, although I was longing to finish my coffee.

"Has the carriage come?" she asked in surprise.

"No; but it won't know where to find us."

"Let me go and fetch it!" said Captain Reading, with his usual readiness (this is not a pun), and off he flew.

"We are going to meet after all at Mrs. Porter's," said Major Bagot, eagerly, as he dropped down into a chair beside me.

"That depends upon circumstances."

"Circumstances over which I hope you have control?" with a smile.

"Over which I have none."

"Miss Mordaunt, tell me, what can possibly stop you?"

"Papa won't give his permission till the last moment."

"But then you are sure between you to drag it out of him?"

"I shan't try," I said, hastily.

"But then you are not under orders; you can come without."

"I certainly should not think it worth while."

"You wouldn't come without his permission?" in angry surprise.

"I would not come without Effie, that's what I meant."

His face cleared.

"But we should be there."

"Yes, Major Bagot; but you I cannot trust," very gravely, with my head in the air, and I walked away.

The carriage was there, and we got into it directly. Captain Reading put his head in at the window, and engaged Effie for the first dance on Christmas Eve. But when Major Bagot tried to do the same by me, I told him coldly that I did not like to make any engagements, as I should probably spend the evening at Lone Hall, and I never saw a man look more crestfallen. I drove away quite pleased at having asserted my dignity, which yesterday he lowered.

Directly we parted from them, and when they were still standing, hats in hand, on the damp pavement, we passed Basil Conyers, who made a sign to the coachman to stop.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"Driving home!"

"That I can see for myself. I can also see that you have been amusing yourselves, as you did on the ice."

"I beg your pardon. There were no shops on the river, and there was no skating in the shops."

"I don't think it was the skating you cared for," the corners of his mouth turning down.

I pulled down the other window and shouted "Home." It was the best snub I could think of, and it had an instantaneous effect.

"One moment," he said, more respectfully. "It isn't true that you are going to the Porters?"

"I hope so," and Effie smiled.

"I hope not," he said, to my surprise. "It is most unwise." Then turning to me, "Stop it if you can, for her father's sake as well as her own!"

I went back with a fresh anxiety on my mind.

(To be continued.)

ALL petitions to the House of Commons must be in handwriting, and may not be printed.



[THE YOUNG MAN TIED UP THE NOSEGAY CAREFULLY, AND HANDED IT TO DORIS.]

NOVELETTE.]

SIMPSON'S LUCK.

—C—

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE SIMPSON was a gentleman, although there was nothing at all aristocratic about his name. He came of a good family; but his father had been a younger son, who possessed, moreover, the recklessness and audacity to marry, on an income of two hundred a year, a girl without a penny. All the Simpkins who were well-to-do shook their heads at his folly, and dropped him at once. Perhaps he had been rash, but he never repented his imprudence. He lived long enough to see his boy in a position to earn his own living, and to feel sure George would take care of his mother.

George did his best, but the love which had endured, for five-and-twenty years of poverty, seemed stronger than aught else. Mrs. Simpson never recovered the shock of her husband's death; and when, within three years, she followed him to the grave, her one regret was that she left George alone in the world.

At this time he was a bank clerk, earning a hundred and fifty pounds a year. He had lived in Eastford for most of his life, and yet he had no friends there. Unfortunately for himself, George had inherited the pride of the Simpkins, which, of course, ought to have been entailed with the property, since it was of no value whatever to the younger branch of the family. He loved his father and mother devotedly, but to everyone else he seem indifferent. His fellow-clerks voted him the prettiest fellow going; the bank partners, while admitting his steadiness and ability, considered him a very disagreeable young man. He would make no acquaintances richer than himself for fear of being patronised. He had no pleasure in the society of his inferiors. He

would accept no hospitality he could not return; and so it came about that George Simpson was as lonely as it was possible for any young man to be.

He did not feel it while his mother lived. After her death, when the funeral was over and he went back to his desk at the Eastford bank, he had a strange, blank sense of desolation. He knew there was not a creature in the world who cared for him or his sorrow, and the knowledge saddened him, even though he realised that it was in part his own fault, since he had systematically checked all attempts at intimacy from his fellow-clerks.

He went home to his tea, and it did not improve his temper to read in the *Morning Post* (George was a staunch Conservative) that Lady Simpson had given a "small dance" the day before. He quite forgot, in his indignation, that as his uncle, Sir Edmund, had not married till several years after the family quarrel his wife probably ignored the fact that Mrs. Simpson, of Eastford, was her sister-in-law, much more that the poor lady had been buried on the day of her party.

"I should like to be rich," muttered George, bitterly. "If only I could make a name for myself people would repent their insults."

Now, no one had insulted the bank clerk except in his own imagination; but George was in a melancholy frame of mind, and almost morbid on the subject of the neglect shown to his mother and himself. When the tea-things were removed, instead of getting his book and his pipe as usual he put one hand to his head, and sat down to think seriously over his fortunes, and see if there was any chance of mending them.

He was not a mercenary man, but he was proud and ambitious. To rise to a position equal to that of the relatives who scorned him was his great desire.

Unluckily, fortunes do not come by wishing for them. Think as he would George Simpson could see no royal road to success. If he left the bank he had no idea what he was fitted

for. If he stayed there the only prospect of advancement was rising gradually to the position of senior clerk at two hundred a-year; and then, as soon as a vacancy occurred, becoming manager of one of the branch banks, with perhaps half as much again.

Even this post, the highest within his reach, would seem nothing in the eyes of the Simpkins of Park-lane, and Lynfield Castle.

George did not live in regular lodgings, but in a little cottage about a mile out of the town, where a woman, who had once been his mother's servant, was only too glad to let her best room to her former mistress.

The widow, who regarded the Simpkins almost as benefactors, since through them she had gained both home and husband, had given up the little front garden entirely to her lodgers—for Mrs. Simpson was fond of flowers, and George's one hobby was their culture.

Looking out of the window to-night, the desolate, neglected air of everything struck him. He had not touched the garden since his mother died. Already the weeds were springing up, and the flowers fading for want of water. Dismissing his dreams of fortune, Mr. Simpson exchanged his coat for a short tweed jacket, and, fetching his watering-pot and hoe, went out to the little piece of ground in which he had once taken such a pride.

"She would not have liked to see the place growing wild," he thought, half-mournfully, as he tied up the carnations, "or else I would never trouble about it again."

When he looked up from his work he caught sight of a girl standing just outside the gate and gazing at the flowers, as though she could not take her eyes off them. There were few gardens in Eastford, except such as belonged to the large houses, and were shut in jealously by high brick walls. The town for the most part was modern, and consisted of rows and rows of terraces, streets and streets of small houses, with no ground in front, and only a

tiny back yard, utilised in general to dry the family linen after the weekly wash.

Mrs. Brown's cottage was a mile out of Eastwood. There were several similar dwellings to hers, but being occupied chiefly by working people, the gardens ran wild, and were given up to poultry.

The Simpsons had come to Ivy Cottage directly after the father's death; and Mrs. Brown, in her eagerness to make her old mistress happy in her new abode, had let George carry out any alterations he liked—a neat fence all round the garden, a division of wire-netting to shut off the back-yard with the clothes lines and poultry, had been his first thought. Then he had spent a good deal of his spare cash in flowers and shrubs; one or two old trees already planted supplied shade, and he chose, for the most part, those dear old-fashioned flowers that come up year after year.

This was the third June of his sojourn at Ivy Cottage, and the air was fragrant with the scent of roses, campanias and mignonette, while begonias, candy-tufts and geraniums made the beds bright. A syringa tree was in full bloom, a honeysuckle just coming into flower.

Many people stopped to look at the quaint, peaceful spot. Admiration for his garden was nothing new to George, but he had never seen anyone look at it with such wistful, yearning eyes as this girl.

She seemed about eighteen or nineteen, and her dress was plain, almost to poverty—just a blue and white cambric, a sailor hat, and black silk gloves; but the gown fitted perfectly; the ribbon on the hat had been arranged with tasteful fingers, and the gloves were neatly mended. She was a lady, evidently, in spite of her poverty.

He never knew what made him speak to her. George was not used to young ladies, and anything but an admirer of them; only the way she looked at his flowers touched him.

He wondered if she lived in one of the new gardenless streets of Eastwood, and if this was her first summer among bricks and mortar.

There was no one at Ivy Cottage now to enjoy his flowers if he gathered them. Why should not this stranger be gladdened with a nosegay.

He went up to the gate, and made his offer abruptly enough. George had no practice in the art of making pretty speeches.

"You seem fond of flowers. May I cut you a few?"

Her eyes brightened. They were beautiful, gray eyes, with just a tinge of blue in their depths.

For one moment she blushed, and the colour lighted up her face, and made it lovely.

"I should be very pleased if you are sure you can spare them. My brother is so fond of flowers!"

"Is he ill?" asked George Simpson, as he began to cut his roses with no ungenerous hand.

"He is very ill," said the girl, sadly. "I was wishing to-night he could walk as far as here just to see your garden; it is so beautiful. When he was well we often used to come past here just to look at the flowers."

George started. Something in the voice struck him as familiar.

"I am sure I know you!" he said, simply. "I have forgotten your name, but I remember your voice perfectly."

"You knew my brother," she replied. "I do not think you ever saw me. Archie was in the Bank till—till Easter."

It came on Simpson then like a revelation—the young clerk, fresh from school, who had had a pleasant word or kindly smile for everyone.

He had been the favourite of all the young men who occupied stalls in the Eastwood Bank; the first in every innocent piece of fun going on; and then one Monday morning he was not at his post, and they heard he had been thrown from his tricycle, and seriously injured. The bank was closed.

There had been quite an excitement about it at the time. Mr. Fletcher, the manager, had talked of gassing up a subscription for poor young Elton, and then someone had represented the lad was a gentleman, and had rich relations.

George Simpson did not think these last could have done much for Archie, judging from his nose's appearance.

The nosegay was finished now. The clerk laid it up carefully, and said a little awkwardly to Doris,

"I wish you would let me carry it for you? Elton might like to see me. I know some of the fellows droppin' to tell him the news, but a fresh face is a change."

"He would be very pleased. Yes, they used to come, but they got tired. You see he has been ill so long now—nearly three months."

"But he will get better soon," said George, reassuringly. "People always get better when they are young and have good spirits, and I am sure Elton's were the best I ever saw."

Doris smiled sadly.

"I am afraid you will find him very much changed."

"What was it?" asked George. "I know he fell off his tricycle, but what was the injury?"

"Something to the spine," answered Doris, gravely. "The doctor says he will never walk again."

George was silent from sheer compassion. Never walk again! That bright-faced boy, who had seemed all life and motion, a cripple at barely seventeen! It seemed too awful. Mr. Simpson began to reflect there might be worse luck in the world than his own, after all.

"Have you been in Eastwood long?" he asked Doris, presently.

"Only since Archie got the clerkship."

"And do you live all alone?"

"We have lodgings in Mill-street. It is not a very nice part; but the landlady is clean, and attentive to Archie when I am out. I have to leave him a great deal, poor fellow, for I am one of the teachers at Miss Frost's."

Mill-street was one of the dreariest parts of Eastwood—the houses small, stuffy, and confined.

George thought it would have made him miserable if his mother had had to live in such a place; but Doris Astor took the poorness of her abode quite as a matter of course, and her voice was almost joyous as she held up her flowers to the little bow window, and exclaimed,—

"See what I have brought you!"

George waited in the little passage, saying diffidently,—

"He may not care to see me. I ought to have been to inquire for him long ago; but—"

"You have had trouble of your own," said Doris, gently. "I am sure Archie will be pleased to see you." Then, in a whisper, "You will not let him know what I said about his spine. I have kept it from him."

It seemed to George Simpson more like a Archie's ghost than the bright-faced lad he had seen three months ago full of life and health.

The fingers were thin and wasted, the face drawn and pinched, while the wistful eagerness with which the blue eyes fastened on the flowers made George regret he had not cut twice the quantity.

"It is very kind of you to come," said the boy, simply. "I get so tired of being here alone, and Doris has to be out so much."

Doris had taken up a piece of knitting, and the quickness with which her fingers moved convinced Mr. Simpson the work was done for money, not for pleasure.

"I should have come before," returned George; "but I never thought of it, and lately I have been in trouble myself."

"I know. We saw it in the *Gazette*. We were so sorry for you!"

It was the first word of real sympathy George had heard.

"You have lost your mother too, perhaps?"

"Yes, she died when I was a baby. I have no one but Doris."

George wondered about the rich relations. Was it possible these two young things were alone in the world?

"You forgot Cousin Jabez!" put in Doris. "He means to be kind; but he is so used to London he does not understand how we long for the country. He got Archie his post at the bank, and he recommended me to Miss Frost. She is very kind."

"And have you any friends here?"

Archie smiled a little sadly.

"I think my illness has tired them out. They find it dull work sittin' in this little room. Mr. Fletcher came once, but Doris offended him."

"I nearly turned him out of the house," confessed Doris, "I was so indignant."

"But what did he do?" inquired Simpson, who could not fancy the prim middle-aged manager being dismissed by that young girl.

"He wanted me to send Archie to the hospital." There was a silent sob in her voice.

"Fancy sending him to a place where I could only have been able to see him twice a week!"

"It was abominable," declared George, with an energy which quite delighted Doris.

But the invalid looked graver, and when his sister had stepped away to take off her hat he said, thoughtfully, to Mr. Simpson:

"She cannot see the truth, and I have not the courage to tell her. The doctor thinks I shall never be any better, and it is not fair she should spend all her life and strength toiling for me."

"That's nonsense!" said George, flatly. "She's happier with you to nurse and look after than she possibly could be alone. I don't wonder she was indignant with Mr. Fletcher. I'm sure I should have been."

He was a frequent visitor after that June evening. He would come in with a few flowers or a new book as naturally as though it was his right to be there.

Archie grew to look for his coming, and wonder how in the old days he could have thought Simpson stiff and cold. And Doris—well, Doris felt a strange, wistful sympathy for the only human creature she had ever met, who seemed even more lonely and desolate than themselves.

By degrees he learned their little history. George never asked a question, but as he grew more at home with them he could gather their story pretty well from the stray remarks dropped from time to time.

A clergyman's children, they had been left penniless at his death, except for an annuity of fifty pounds a year, which her godfather had settled upon Doris. She was eighteen then, her brother four years younger. She gave up her little income that he might have two years more at school, while she earned a living as a nursery governess.

Then "Cousin Jabez" exerted himself for his poor relations, and found the boy the clerkship at Eastwood Bank, and the girl her position at Miss Frost's.

Their income was, perhaps, a hundred-and-twenty pounds all told, but on this they had been quite happy till the accident which changed Archie from a strong, healthy youth to a helpless invalid, and reduced their means further by the loss of his small salary.

George Simpson seemed quite to have forgotten his ambitious dreams. All through those summer months he was a frequent visitor in Mill-street. He cheered the invalid as no one else could do. He never tired of reading to her when Doris was busy. In fact, he had found a fresh interest in life, and about this time people began to notice a wonderful change in him.

"I never saw anyone so much improved as Simpson is lately!" said Mr. Fletcher to his wife. "He used to be as sulky and disagreeable as a bear. I thought he would grow perfectly intolerable after his mother's death, but it has softened him wonderfully."

"Good blood always tells in the long run,"

remarked Mrs. Fletcher, who never forgot she came of a very high family. "I always liked young Simpson."

It was about this time that Eastwood was shaken to its foundation by a series of the most alarming robberies possible to imagine. They began in early autumn at the Vicarage — a large house enclosed in spacious grounds, and containing many treasures of art and bric-a-brac, since the vicar was a man of large means, and, having neither wife nor child, had spent his money royally on beautifying his house.

It was the custom for all the servants to go to church on a Sunday evening except one, generally the cook, who was left to guard the house, next to the fires, etcetera.

Imagine the horror of the group when returning, one October evening, they found the cook lying on the kitchen floor perfectly unconscious, her hands and feet tied together, the doors and windows wide open, the plate-baskets emptied, a silver presentation inkstand and salver gone from the study, and the drawerv of the vicar's writing-table standing open, their contents having evidently been overhauled.

When Mr. Brett returned, which he did five minutes after his terrified servants, he sent one of them for the police, and another for the doctor. The latter promptly restored the cook, and gave it as his opinion she had been stupefied by chloroform.

The poor woman's own statement confirmed this. As soon as she could speak she said she had been sitting in the kitchen reading when a man came in. How he managed to open the outer door she had no idea. She started up in terror, but before she could utter a scream he had thrown a dark handkerchief over her face. It was damp, and smelt like chemist's shop. She remembered nothing more till she woke up on her own bed.

Now, the cook had been in Mr. Brett's services over ten years, and was a faithful, respectable woman, of whom the most suspicious person could not have said she was in league with the thief.

The Vicar, much perplexed, went over his house with the police, and made, as carefully as he could, a list of the missing articles. An ill-luck would have it he had cashed a large cheque the day before, as the next morning he had several parish payments to make.

He had left the gold in a small bag locked in one of his writing-table drawers. Needless to say that every coin in it was gone. The plate was solid silver, and in itself of no mean value, but the presentation inkstand and vase, chased with skill and inlaid with gold, had cost hundreds of pounds. Nor had the robbers spared the upper part of the house. The Vicar's dressing-case and other valuables were gone. Judging from the amount of things carried off the constable believed that the thief could not possibly have been single-handed, but must have admitted his accomplices as soon as he had overpowered the unfortunate cook.

It was a mine day's wonder in Eastwood. People who were not fond of church-going declared it was a warning to householders not to leave their premises so badly protected. The vicar himself purchased a small supply of new plate; and the local police, reinforced by help from London, did their best to trace the robbery to its perpetrators in vain. Not a single arrest was made. They could not even light on any one who might be suspected of the outrage. Mr. Brett purchased a bulldog, warranted as very fierce, and obtained him in the back garden, close to the kitchen entrance, and then a little tranquillity came to Eastwood.

But it was not to last. A large jeweller's in the town was broken into quietly one Saturday night, and a large portion of the valuable stock removed, the whole affair being so skilfully and quietly accomplished that though there were assistants sleeping in the upper part of the house their numbers were not even disturbed.

Nor was this all. Within a week the jeweller had a fellow-victim in the shape of a ladies' outsider, who lived opposite. The furs, silks, and lace were carried off, without the slightest clue to the despoilers.

Eastwood people stood aghast, and looked at each other in silent dismay. Here were robberies of unexampled audacity carried on in their midst, and the police could not even find anyone to accuse of the crimes, much less conviction of them.

"Depend upon it we shall be the next victims," said Mr. Fletcher, the bank manager, to George Simpson, who happened to be in his private room on a matter of business one dark afternoon a month later.

Simpson looked up quickly.

"I don't think so, sir," he said, quietly.

"Why not? No one seems to know. Three private houses, not counting the Vicarage, and the two leading shops of the place have suffered!"

"I fancy our safes would defy most burglars," persisted George. "Bonds would be of no use to them, since they dare not turn them into money; and the gold is safely hidden, thanks to your contrivances."

For since the robberies became so frequent, Mr. Fletcher, in a perfect panic, had caused the gold to be carried upstairs every night before closing, and locked in one of the upper rooms, on which he fastened a patent padlock. This was known to but two people besides himself; namely, George and the senior clerk. These took it in turns to remain after the others, and convey the gold upstairs to its new hiding-place, while they came alternate mornings, half-an-hour before the bank opened, to restore it to its usual receptacles below.

Poor Mr. Fletcher wiped the drops off his face. He was a stout, middle-aged man, who received a handsome salary as chief manager of Eastwood Bank, and all the smaller branches connected with it. The wholesale robberies in the town had almost driven him frantic with fear and nervous apprehensions, and George Simpson really pitied his anxiety.

"It's no ordinary thieves, depend upon it, Simpson," said the much-troubled manager, "else some trace of them would be found. What has become of the Vicar's plate and ornaments? Where are Mr. West's jewels, or Mrs. Mander's furs and lace? Do you know the railway people declare no suspicious person has been through the station with any unusual amount of luggage?"

"It wouldn't be an unusual amount," returned George. "The thieves are shrewd enough to take only valuables, that can go into a small compass."

Mr. Fletcher groaned.

"If you are going, Simpson, I'll leave at the same time. I have a kind of horror of being the last person here. I believe I am nervous enough to come back half-a-dozen times to try the door, just to make sure I have locked it."

"I was going; but I can wait if you have anything to detain you."

"Nothing at all," declared the manager, rising with alacrity. It really seemed to George he was anxious to get away.

They went out together; but an old gentleman, with white hair and venerable aspect, was passing at that moment, and buttonholed Mr. Fletcher, so that George went on his way alone. He was not sorry, for Mr. Fletcher's society was rather distasteful to him than otherwise; but he caught a full view of the stranger's face, and was surprised to find how unfavourably it impressed him.

Like many lonely men, George Simpson was a great observer, and like many proud natured he was possessed of strong prejudices. He knew nothing in the world of Mr. Fletcher's acquaintance. He certainly bore him no grudge for depriving him of the manager's society, and yet in that one glimpse he had become imbued with the strongest aversion to the old man.

Was he really old? The question would return to George with unpleasant force. The

stranger at first sight looked nearly eighty; his white hair was rather long, and fell on to his collar at the back. His skin had the shrivelled, parchment-like appearance of extreme age. His eyebrows were like snow; his form was bowed, his walk feeble and stooping, but (it was this which had impressed George Simpson so unfavourably), the eyes themselves were clear and dark. They had all the keen piercing gaze of a young man, and their expression was sinister.

They seemed so utterly out of keeping with his mild, venerable face, as contrasted to the tottering old man, that George Simpson felt a strange suspicion there was something wrong about their owner.

"I wish I knew who that man was," sped through his brain.

"Why, Simpson!" exclaimed one of the other clerks, who happened to be passing. "One would say you had seen a ghost! What are you gazing after the governor for in that absorbed fashion?"

George roused himself at once.

"I believe I am catching Mr. Fletcher's panic about robbery," he said quietly. "I was wondering who would be the next victim."

"Noboddy!" replied Rawlinson, lightly. "It is three weeks since the last; so I should say the thief had exhausted Eastwood, and departed to seek pastures new. It's a pity the governor's got into such a panic, and is wont make him any better to stand there talking to old Gregson."

"Is that Mr. Gregson? I never heard of him before! Who is he?"

"You go through the world in a dream, and never hear anything that is not about business," retorted Rawlinson, "or you would know that old Gregson is a missionary, and that the Governor has let Moor End Cottage to him for six months certain."

"A missionary! Eastwood is not heathen."

"Well, not exactly a missionary. Gregson has made a mint of money, and having neither chick nor child he likes to spend his time in good works and that sort of thing."

"I should never have guessed it from his appearance."

"No, that is rather against him. You know Moor End Cottage belongs to Mrs. Fletcher. Her mother used to live there, and when the old lady died they never dismantled the house, but just let it furnished when they could. Tenants are rare in winter; so old Gregson's offering to take it from September to March was a godsend to them, and they jumped at it. He's a queer old boy, always talking about the wickedness of the world. He lives in the cottage all alone, with his man, who is a blackamoor, and speaks some language no one can understand. As for Gregson himself, I think he's sincere, though mistaken. He's often out from morning till night with his bag of tracts. He mostly starts on a Monday in some big town, and works it steadily through. He doesn't labour (that's his word, not mine) in Eastwood much; it's said the Vicar objects to him."

"Mr. Fletcher seems to like him."

"Oh! they discuss the burglar scheme together. I don't know which of them is the most terrified. However, though Gregson is awfully rich, he never keeps much money in the house, so he can't feel in any danger."

George said good-day to his loquacious fellow-clerk, and went on his way to Mill-street. It was five months since the evening he first saw Doris Elton gazing at his flowers, and those five months had made great changes in his life. George no longer felt existence a very dreary thing. He had quite given up his ambition of rising to a position which would oblige his cousins, the Simpsons of Park-lane and Lynfield Castle, to acknowledge him as an equal. In a word, he was going to follow his father's example and commit the folly (as the world would call it) of marrying for love a girl who had neither riches nor rank for her dowry.

Doris Elton was just twenty-one. She had youth, beauty, and sweet temper; one of the

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truest, sweetest natures Heaven ever made, but her worldly store was only fifty pounds a year, and she was encumbered, moreover, with a young brother, who would be dependent on her all his days. Something of this she said to George when he first spoke of his love. She did not call Archie a burden; she never thought of him as that, but she did say that Mr. Simpson ought not to take such a care on him—young, just beginning life, as it were.

George answered her by a smile. It was in lovely September evening, and the two were taking Archie for a ride in an invalid chair. They had left him where he could see the golden cornfields just ripe for harvest, and gone themselves to gather a bunch of the bright red poppies that grew among the wheat.

"I will never be sent away," said the young man, resolutely, "unless you tell me you cannot love me. As to what you say about Archie, I shall never be a rich man, but I think I can earn enough to keep my wife from want; and Doris, I promise you that I would share all I had with him."

She blushed crimson.

"I could never leave him," she whispered. "I am all he has in the world."

"You are all I hope for in the world," replied George, "and I would never ask you to leave him—never while I live."

"It would not be fair of you."

"I am the best judge of that."

"You see," said the poor child, wistfully, "he will never be able to earn his own living, never be better than you see him now."

"I know that."

"And I could not bear it if we—came to you, and you grew to think him a burden. Do you know, George, if you got tired of him, and wished him dead—I think it would kill me!"

"Doris, could you suspect me of such cruelty?"

"No; but Cousin Jabez offered to try and get him into a home for incurable cripples, and I would not let him go. I can't expect you to feel as I do. George, but the very thought of it would kill me!"

George stroked her hand fondly.

"I think Archie likes me," he observed, presently. "We always get on together."

"He is very fond of you, but—"

"And if you married me he would not lose any more of your society than he does now—not so much, for Miss Frost claims a great deal of your time. Don't you see, Doris, as my wife you would be able to do more for Archie, not less?"

"Yes, but—I want to think of you."

"Do you? Then please listen to me; but tell me first, Doris, have I ever deceived you?"

"Never."

"Then you're bound to believe what I say. If you send me away you will blight my life, and make my future a dreary, hopeless affair. All I want is your promise to marry me as soon as I am a little better off. Before very long I hope to have two hundred a-year. That is the income my parents married on, and I think we should find it enough."

"I am sure we should."

"Then you will say 'yes'?"

"There is one other thing," he said, after a pause—a long pause, which had transformed them into plighted lovers, and given them what seemed to both a foretaste of Paradise. "Before we are married I shall insure my life, and settle the policy on you, and then you can make over your own little fortune to Archie. He will feel so much more independent if he has something of his own."

"George, I think there was never anyone in the world so generous as you."

And so the friendless man became engaged to be married, and his harsh, reserved manners softened wonderfully. He began to discover his pride was selfishness, and he made more friends than autumn than he had ever done before.

Archie, of course, knew of his sister's happiness, and gave his approval willingly. He was

fond of Doris, but he clung to George with all an invalid's admiration for strength.

Mr. Simpson was hoping for a rise of salary at Christmas, and if it came he had decided not to wait till his income reached two hundred, but to rush into matrimony at once.

He had saved money for furniture. He knew Doris would not be an extravagant wife, and it troubled him to see how white and fragile she was growing.

He could not bear to think of her teaching from nine till four, and then with the care of an invalid to fill all her scant leisure. It hurt him to see her ceaseless knitting, to notice the scanty fires, and poor attempts at winter wraps, which were all she could afford, and so he had quite decided when the "rise" came at Christmas to make her consent to a speedy wedding.

He had yet another reason. Dr. Parish, whom he had consulted privately in the character of a future brother-in-law, had told him Archie's disease was making rapid strides. There might be no visible alteration in the poor lad for some time, but his life could not be much prolonged, and before she lost her brother, George wanted Doris to be safe under his care.

He was surprised to find how much regret he felt personally for the doctor's verdict.

He had always accepted Doris's statement that, though Archie would never be any better, he might live for years as he was.

He guessed now that the doctor had not had the courage to tell the devoted sister the whole truth, but hoped the signs of increasing weakness would break it to her before the end came.

CHAPTER II.

MILL STREET, as has been hinted before, was not a fashionable locality. Etiquette had no very rigid code there, so people were not at all horrified at George Simpson's frequent visits to the Eltons.

It was generally surmised that he was "after" Doris (a local phrase, meaning something equivalent to what is termed in a higher sphere paying his addresses to); but the matrons of Mill-street, if they gave the question a thought at all, considered her invalid brother quite sufficient chaperone for the girl; and Miss Frost, who, as an instructor of youth, might have had very stern views on the subject, had been so attracted years before by George's devotion to his mother that she not only graciously approved of the engagement, but even told Doris she thought her a very lucky girl.

Doris welcomed her lover with a bright smile; and George Simpson found himself forgetting all about the robberies and Mr. Fletcher's panic in the delights of her society.

Archie was better than usual, and the trio spent a very pleasant evening.

It was only when George was thinking of taking leave that the invalid complained of pain. Then, looking at him closely, George perceived a strange change in his face.

An indescribable fear filled the clerk's heart that this was the beginning of the end; and, wording his offer carefully, so as not to alarm Doris, he proposed to her to go and fetch the doctor before returning home.

"Do you think he is much worse?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"I hope not; but I don't like the look on his face. Besides, Dr. Parish might be able to give him something to ease the pain."

That settled it with Doris, and she was only eager for the surgeon to be fetched.

George started at once, but it was a long way to Dr. Parish's house, and he had to wait some time before he could see him.

"Young Elton worse!" exclaimed the doctor, kindly. "I'll go round and look at him, Mr. Simpson, but it's very little I or any other doctor can do for him."

His brougham was waiting. It had just brought him home from a distant patient's,

and he invited George to a seat in it, saying quietly,—

"You will want to hear all I can tell you about him. I wish you had a mother or sister to be with Miss Elton now. I never saw a girl so utterly alone."

George shook his head.

"I am as friendless as she is."

"She ought not to be alone," said the doctor, gravely. "That poor lad may go off at any minute. She ought to have some friend staying with her. I have it!" in a tone of relief, as though a happy thought had struck him. "I will go to the Home, and get one of the Sisters to come round."

It was past eleven o'clock.

George suggested that the advent of a stranger at such an hour would give Doris more alarm than comfort. The doctor only shook his head.

"Miss Elton is a sensible girl. If this is the beginning of the end she will understand she cannot teach all day and sit up all night. For her brother's sake she will welcome help."

He sprang out at the lodge of the Sisters' Hospital, which they were then passing. One of the sweet-faced Sisters was even then passing through the gates.

A word or two to her and she entered the brougham, Dr. Parish explaining the need for her help as they went along.

"I will wait in the carriage till you have explained my coming to Miss Elton," said Sister Sarah, gently. "Poor girl, she ought not to be alone! Tell her I will gladly set up with her brother."

George had been disposed to think Dr. Parish was taking too gloomy a view of the case, and had rather resented the Sister's presence; but when he saw the change which had taken place in Archie during his absence he felt thankful for her help.

The boy lay in bed, his face white with pain. Low groans every now and then escaped him—the only sign of life.

Doris, a stony look of grief in her beautiful eyes, looked almost like a statue.

Dr. Parish wrote a prescription, and George hurried off to the nearest chemist's.

"It will at least soothe his pain," said the doctor, kindly. "And then, my dear, when he has taken the opiate, do go and lie down, and let the Sister watch by your brother."

"I cannot leave him!" said Doris, faintly. "He would not die in peace without me!"

"He is not going to die yet," said Dr. Parish, firmly. "It may be some weeks, certainly some days, before the end. If you do not spare yourself now you will break down, and be useless to him."

The Sister joined her persuasions, and Doris was overruled.

When Archie had swallowed the opiate, and seemed to sink into a heavy sleep, she suffered herself to be led away to her own room, and Dr. Parish and George left the house.

"I am afraid our ways are not the same, or I would have driven you home," said the former, pleasantly. "You won't have much of a night's rest, for it has long struck one."

"I shall call the first thing in the morning to know how he is," said George, eagerly. "Dr. Parish, do you think there is no hope?"

"Not the slightest," returned the other, promptly. "But—and by-and-by Miss Elton will like to know this—after that accident last Easter it was only a question of time. If he had been a millionaire's son or a prince nothing could have saved him."

They parted cordially, and George struck off quickly in the direction of home, his heart pretty full of Doris, and his mind quite made up that she should be his wife before poor Archie died, even if he had to take her home to his rooms in Mrs. Brown's cottage.

He was a singularly quiet and regular life, and this was the first time he had ever been out so late. There was nothing priggish or effeminate about him; but, caring nothing for theatres and places of amusement, visiting nowhere but in Mill-street, where he always took leave as the clock struck ten, it came about

quite naturally that there was nothing to take him abroad in the small hours of the night.

The chimes of the Minster rung out two as he passed it, and turned into Eastwood High-street.

Never before had he seen that bustling thoroughfare so completely given over to sleep.

If there was a policeman, he had carefully hidden his whereabouts, for there was no sign of human habitation. It seemed like the dwelling of the dead.

Suddenly—he always felt afterwards it must have been an inspiration—he looked across the road at the compact red building which formed the bank.

There was a gas lamp exactly opposite, and by its light he distinctly saw two shadows flash across the blind of one of the upper windows.

He paused for one instant. That window belonged to the room where, according to the manager's latest hobby, the gold was secreted.

The sub manager, a man of grey hairs and irreproachable character, always slept at the bank. In fact, he lived on the premises, but it seemed impossible he should get up in the middle of the night and patrol the rooms. Besides—it came back to George like a flash of lightning—William White was then absent on private business.

He had been sent for, one day before, to his sister's dying bed; and Mr. Fletcher, who was a kind-hearted man in the main, had bidden him not hurry back if he were wanted in Devonshire.

Those shadows on the blind meant mischief. He was as certain of it as though he had seen the thieves at their work.

The question was, how to proceed? If he went upstairs and confronted them alone they might overpower him, and make off with their booty.

The thing was to get help, but how could he make sure of them, and prevent their escape, while he went for assistance?

It was his turn to be early at the bank in the morning, and carry the gold downstairs. For this purpose he had the keys in his pocket. If the two burglars were in the same room and had left the skeleton key, which doubtless admitted them, in the lock outside, his course was easy, and he could take them in a prison of their own making; if not—but the chance was at least worth trying.

Putting in his key he noiselessly opened the door of the bank. Taking off his boots he went upstairs in his stocking feet to the room where Mr. Fletcher had chosen to secrete the gold. Every time the stairs creaked he felt as though the game was lost. At last he reached the door and found, as he had hoped, the key in the lock outside; and saw, what he had quite forgotten, that the door was fitted on the outside with two strong brass bolts. He slipped these in an instant, turned the key in the lock, and drew a breath of relief, as he realised that, whoever was shut up in that room, friend or foe, was a prisoner during his own good pleasure. He could hear the rattle of the sovereigns, which seemed to be being poured out of their bags, and he distinctly caught an angry question from one man as to whether his companion heard anything, and the contemptuous reply of the other that it was nothing but rats!

"Fine rats you'll find it," thought George, as he went downstairs to deliberate on his next move. The robbers being on the fourth floor, its window moreover secured by iron bars, that they should attempt to throw themselves out seemed unlikely. The brass bolts would certainly keep them in bondage some time, but as there was no telling what tools they had with them it would not do to trust infallibly to this; but George hardly liked to go to Mr. Fletcher's.

The manager lived two miles out of the town; and, besides the delay the walk would cause, the poor man was in such an anxious, excited state he could hardly be trusted to give prudent orders when aroused. The simplest

course seemed to be to go to the police station.

Now, the frequent robberies at Eastwood had created considerable public interest, and the authorities at head quarters had not only administered a severe rebuke to the sergeant in charge of the local police station for his failure to detect the burglars, but they had sent down a London inspector, who ordered him about with scant ceremony, and made the superseded sergeant extremely wrath.

Inspector Scott, of course, did not sleep at the police station. Neither did he wear uniform. He put up like a private gentleman at the Rose and Crown, and occupied himself by day with stealthy inquiries, while by night he slept the sleep of the just.

It is not too much to say that every member of the force at Eastwood hated Inspector Scott, and cherished a secret hope that he might fail in his mission of finding the mysterious burglars, or that—better still—they themselves might light on the discovery without his assistance.

George Simpson was quite aware of this local foible, and also that Sergeant Martin had been extra wide awake and alert ever since the stranger had arrived from London.

Eastwood was a large town, but not so large but that the policemen in charge recognised Mr. Simpson at once not only as one of the clerks at the bank, but as a gentleman who lived at a cottage about a mile out of the town.

Although their failure in the case of the present robberies was fast giving the Eastwood police a bad name, they were in truth poor men—very fair specimens of ordinary county town officials.

B 24 touched his hat to George civilly enough, and said,—

"You're the last person I'd have expected to see, Mr. Simpson. What is wrong?"

"I want to speak to Sergeant Martin."

"He's just gone off, sir. If it's nothing out of the common I can attend to it."

George leaned forward and spoke in almost a whisper.

"I believe another of those mysterious robberies is being perpetrated to-night, and that if you are quick you will catch the thieves red-handed."

"Goodness!"

There was no doubt about B 24's energy now. In a moment he had roused Sergeant Martin, and brought his superior to hear the story.

"No need to say a word to the gentleman from London I suppose," said George, artfully. "I thought it better to come to you first, sergeant. Of course, if you won't listen to me I can go on to Inspector Scott."

"There's no need for that, sir," said Martin, promptly. "I'm at your service, and I can get half-a-dozen men together in no time. Where is it?"

"The bank!"

The sergeant looked aghast.

"Well, Mr. Fletcher has expected it long enough, but I never thought it a likely place myself, with a clerk sleeping on the premises."

"He's away," and George told his story, not forgetting the fact that he had eaged the robbers in their own den securely.

"You're an honour to the town, sir," cried the Sergeant, admiringly. "If you think there's but two men in it, perhaps myself and B 24 'll be enough to manage 'em. I don't want more men than I can help in it, lest they should let out a word to that meddlesome London inspector."

"I believe there are only two. I'll go back with you myself, sergeant."

They left B 24 to guard the door, and went up together to the burglars. Once the door opened, they found their work out out. The floor was strewn with gold, which the men had been pouring into black Gladstone bags when they were disturbed.

They were both, apparently, in the prime of life. One was dark enough to have passed for

a Spaniard. The other was fair and clean-shaven, but, strange enough, had fierce, mocking black eyes.

He was the ringleader, and to capture him was a task which took every effort.

The sergeant almost wished he had brought more men, for the robber fought for his freedom desperately, scratching like a wild cat, and using a knife he happened to have on him skilfully. But Simpson had overcome his adversary, and got the handcuffs safely on him, and so could come to the sergeant's assistance. Then they were reinforced by B 24, whose duties as doorkeeper were no longer required when both robbers were in their captor's power.

As for George, he was conscious of a faint, sick feeling, and that his arm was dull and heavy, while his clothes were stained with blood, thanks to the foreign-looking knife with which he had been attacked.

"Well," said the Sergeant, triumphantly, "it's the neatest night's work I ever did, and you'd be a credit to the force yourself, Mr. Simpson. You've saved the bank a fortune in gold, to say nothing of these," pointing to the bureau full of bonds which the robbers had prepared to carry off.

"I wonder if they did the other things," said George, thoughtfully, quite forgetting that though hand-cuffed the prisoners were still capable of hearing him.

"Yes," said the man with the knife coolly. "You may spare yourself further thought about the Eastwood robberies, Mr. Sergeant. My friend and I are answerable for them. We had no confederates and no assistants. We began with the Vicarage, and we succeeded with all we undertook until to-night. The game's up now, but there's no denying we've had a pretty good game. I don't know what other business would return thousands of pounds profit in less than two months."

"And where are the spoils?" demanded B 24. "Where have you hidden them?"

"That, my good man, is entirely our affair," replied the other. "And, I may add, we do not feel disposed to take you into our confidence."

"You'd better go for the doctor, and look sharp about it," said the Sergeant to his subordinate. "Mr. Simpson's fainting. When you've been to Dr. Parish, bring back one or two of our men, and we'll have these fellows, in the cells in no time."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN George Simpson came to himself he was lying on the sofa in the manager's own room, and Dr. Parish stood watching him with an anxious face.

"That's right," he said, in a relieved tone, as the clerk's eyes slowly opened. "You'll do now. Do you know you have given us a fright?"

"I think I had one myself," said George faintly. "Why," perceiving one arm was bandaged and in a sling, "what has happened to me?"

"Why you have been acting as a hero, and receiving rather an unpleasant arm-thrust from one of the men whose villainy you discovered."

"Ah!" in a weary tone. "And was I in time? Is the money safe?"

"Safe as possible; and here's Mr. Fletcher, waiting to thank you."

There was genuine emotion in the manager's voice as, pressing forward to the sofa, he said eagerly,—

"I shall never forget your conduct, Simpson. You have saved the directors thousands of pounds, and me from a remorse that would have darkened my life."

"It was only my duty," said George, simply. "And the sergeant fought splendidly. I hope he'll get the credit of it; and didn't the men confess they had been at the bottom of all the robberies here lately?"

"The beginning and end of them, the ser-

gent says," replied Dr. Parish, warmly. "But what they've done with their spoils no one can make out."

"Where did they live?"

"Came from London, Inspector Scott declares. He says they are notorious characters, who have been 'wanted' by the police for months."

"No one was safe from them," said Mr. Fletcher, mournfully. "Even my tenant, good old Gregson, who lives in my little cottage on the Moor, declared he could not sleep in his bed for fear of them. He gave me notice yesterday, though his time was not up till March, that he should be obliged to leave at once. He behaved very handsomely, paid his rent for the full term; but it shows what terror these men have made in the neighbourhood, that even a pious old man of seventy cannot live at peace."

There was no question about George Simpson having a holiday. His right arm was practically useless, so that he could not have performed any of his duties had the manager insisted on his coming to the bank as usual; but, to do Mr. Fletcher justice, he was only too eager to give the clerk a well-earned rest.

"I have telegraphed to two of our directors, and they'll be down today. I've no doubt, Mr. Simpson, they will mark their sense of your exemplary conduct."

George felt almost too ill to care. He wanted to go to Mill-street, but was warned he must attend the first examination of the prisoners before the magistrates, which was fixed for ten o'clock.

Nothing very important transpired. His evidence, backed by that of Sergeant Martin, left no doubt of the men having been on the bank premises with the intention of committing a felony. Dr. Parish testified to the injuries George had received from the elder of the two prisoners, and the Vicar's housekeeper identified the other as the man who had come into the kitchen and stupefied her by means of a handkerchief steeped in chloroform. In fact, the two could do nothing against such an overwhelming mass of evidence, and they were both formally committed to take their trial at the forthcoming assizes. And then George Simpson was taken home by the kindly doctor, who assured him Archie was better, and that if he persisted in going to Mill-street he would only be giving Doris two invalids on her hands instead of one.

For days after that George was very ill. Not only the injury to his arm, but the strain he had undergone, combined together to keep him low. For a week he was in bed, unable to move hand or foot, and lying for the most part unconscious; and when he came back at last, pale and feeble from the very gates of the valley of the shadow of death, it was to find that Archie Elton had trodden that same valley, and Doris was alone in the world.

The bank behaved generously to the man who had served them so well. The senior clerk having been promoted to the management of a branch bank the directors gave George Simpson his post, with a free holiday until the first of February, and a handsome piece of plate, with an elaborate inscription, laudatory of his prowess on that November night, besides a purse of sovereigns.

Mr. Fletcher, who was not to be outdone in kindness by the directors, had a proposal of his own to make.

Mr. Simpson naturally wished to barter at once. He could not bring his bride to Mrs. Brown's humble abode. Why should the young people not occupy Moor End Cottage?

"It's as pretty a house as you would find in day's journey," said the manager, eagerly; "and Mrs. Fletcher and I hope you'll accept the free use of it for the first three years of your married life. Time enough to talk about rent after that. It was her mother's, and she has a sort of affection for the place, and couldn't bear for it to be in unknown hands. Old Mr. Gregson kept up the garden, and made it quite a pretty home, and I make no doubt you'll do the same. In three years' time, perhaps,

there may be nice houses nearer Eastwood, but at present, as you know yourself, there's nothing there between mansions and hovels. If you accept my offer you'll not have to think of furniture or anything of that sort. You've only just to step in and take possession. Old Gregson went off the very day after he spoke to me—never even troubled to send me the keys. Poor man, I never saw anyone so scared of burglars. Mrs. Fletcher and I shall both be hurt if you refuse to be our tenant. You can take the use of the cottage as a wedding present if you like."

George Simpson's pride had softened under the influence of Doris Elton. He saw that the manager really wanted to serve him, and he knew that the Fletchers were rich enough to make the rent of Moor End Cottage a trifle to them.

Rawlinson had called the missionary's taking it for six months a godsend to them; but this did not refer to the gain of money so much as to the house being off their hands. When it was unlet the airing and caretaking of it were perfect nightmares to Mrs. Fletcher.

George reflected the sad Doris needed just such a home as Moor End Cottage. It would be a boon to go in at once without any buying of furniture; and without accepting the full extent of Mr. Fletcher's kindness, and occupying his house for three years rent free, it might yet be a great help to them to begin their married life there.

Doris put off her black dress for one day, and the two who loved so truly were married in Christmas week.

Mr. Fletcher gave away the bride, and his kind-hearted wife promised that when they returned from Hastings they should find fire burning, and a servant and provisions waiting for them at Moor End Cottage.

"Just Simpson's luck!" someone muttered, enviously, as he drove off on his honeymoon. "Two hundred a year, a house rent free, and the prettiest wife in Eastwood. Some people are born fortunate."

"Cousin Jabez" did not trouble himself to come to the wedding. He sent Doris a plated teaset and his good wishes, which he thought was all that could be expected of him.

The bridegroom's kindred did even less, for they took no notice of him whatever on the auspicious occasion; but then, what interest could the Simpsons of Park-lane and Lyndfield Castle be expected to feel in a bank clerk and his wife?

As for George, the ambitious schemes which had filled his head at the time of his mother's death seemed completely to have vanished. He felt quite contented with his lot, and had discovered Eastwood boasted a good many nice people, and that he really did not care in the least whether his relatives ever noticed him or not.

He and Doris would be happy in their own home, and quite forget the fact that his grandfather had been a baronet of ancient family and large fortune.

They were to spend a month at Hastings, returning to Eastwood the end of January.

The purse of sovereigns had made this trip not only possible, but quite within their means.

They took lodgings in Trinity-street, and probably none of the people then enjoying the mild climate of the pleasant Sussex resort were happier than Mr. and Mrs. George Simpson.

They did not make many friends. They were more than enough for each other; but Doris, with the memory of the brother so lately lost fresh in her heart, took a special interest in an invalid youth they often met on the parade drawn about in a bath-chair, while beside it there usually walked a lady about forty, elegantly dressed, and with the remains of great beauty.

"I feel so sorry for her!" said Doris to her husband one morning, when they had just passed the little procession. "I think he is very ill. He has the same look on his face Archie had at the end."

"You are too tender-hearted, Doris," re-

turned George, fondly. "You will have enough to do if you feel sorry for all the strangers you meet."

But, in spite of Mr. Simpson's fond rebuke, the bride continued to take a warm interest in the mother and son.

One morning, as they passed the house while the landlady was in the room, she noticed the direction of her lodger's glance, and said, feelingly,—

"It's a sad thing, isn't it, ma'am? He's her only son—the only child left, in fact, of eight. She's been to Hastings year after year. First there was a happy, laughing family of children, but each winter it grew smaller, and now that boy, Master Adrian, as they call him, is the last left. They're lodging with my sister in Manor-square, and she says nothing can save him."

"But what is it?" asked Doris.

"Consumption, ma'am. It seems it was in the lady's family; and, though it passed over her, it's fallen on every one of her children. Her husband's a grand gentleman up in London, proud of his name and fortune; and they do say he's not too kind to her, and taunts her with the blight she's brought on his children. It may be that as much as the little ones' deaths that's changed her so. Why, she was little more than a girl when she first came down here; and she can't be five-and-thirty now. That's her oldest child, Master Adrian, and he's fifteen."

"It's a sad story," agreed Mrs. George Simpson; "but surely it can't be true. No man could be so cruel to his wife."

"It's true enough, ma'am. Every winter now for eight years have they been to my sister's rooms, and every winter with one less. He's a proud, cold man, they say, and never cared much for the little girls; but his heart was just wrapped up in Master Adrian, the heir."

"Poor lady!" said Doris, pityingly. "What is her name?"

"Well, as to that, ma'am, her name's the same as yours; and, though Simpson's not such a very uncommon name, I did think at first you might be relations, but my sister she said no. Lady Simpson had none of her husband's family left."

Doris had never heard that George's father was own brother to a banker. She never dreamed that the landlady was mistaken, and the bereaved mother her husband's aunt. She did not repeat the conversation to George, but from that time she looked with additional pity on the poor boy and his mother; feeling that, with such a husband, the lady's cap of suffering was full enough without the death of the last remaining child.

On the twenty-ninth of January the Simpsons went home to Eastwood, and Doris was delighted when she saw Moor End Cottage. It was one of those dwellings—last dying out now—where comfort and convenience had been studied before show. There was ample accommodation for a small family, and yet all was so handy and compact that the work was well within the power of one servant.

Seem even in winter the cottage was a pleasant place, though, of course, the givre de Dijon roses, the honeysuckle, and purple clematis which made the front of the house a glory, all summer time, were bare and leafless. The door opened into a square hall, whose bare oak floor was nearly covered with fine rugs of foreign manufacture. Two-sitting rooms and the kitchen all opened from this hall, and above were four bedrooms of moderate size. A cellar ran underneath the whole of the house. The garden was large and productive. A well had once supplied the needs of the tenants, but this had been drained and filled up so carefully that its site, instead of being a disfigurement, was marked by the extra fertility of the soil, so that the fairest flowers grew on that spot.

The furniture was substantial, clean, and in good repair—oak for the dining room, rosewood for the sitting room, piano book case, writing table; in fact, all reasonable modern requirements.

ments had been added, and on the landing stood a press, well stocked with household linen.

"George, it is just the home," whispered Doris, when she had made the tour of the house—it was too late to think of going through the garden—"I am sure we shall be happy here."

"Heaven grant it!" replied her husband, almost solemnly. He was thinking how wondrous had been his blessing through the last eight months. First, Doris and her love, which he valued most of all; then the gradual approval and confidence of his fellow-men, which his pride and indifference had so long estranged; then his wonderful rise of salary—it had been nearly doubled—the directors' handsome present; and last, but not least, Mr. Fletcher's kind offer of Moor End Cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY had been home just a month, when George was obliged to go to the county town, where the assizes were held, to give evidence against Messrs. Jeans and Newcome, the two burglars whom he had been instrumental in capturing.

He did not at all like the duty, and it was made still more irksome by the fact that the victims of the former robberies (with the exception of the Vicar), though praising Mr. Simpson's valour as it deserved, were yet of opinion that if only pressure had been put on the thieves they might have disclosed what they had done with their plunder, and so a portion of it have been restored.

Mr. Brett was the person who told George of this feeling.

"You see," said the Vicar, simply, "they don't see it was quite as much their place to protect their goods as it was yours to protect the bank's. My house was the first attacked, and I say frankly, it served me right for leaving so many valuables protected only by one woman; but my misfortunes might have served as a warning to others. They might have redoubled their bolts and bars, or tried the expedient of a fierce dog. Instead of this they did nothing; and when in course of time you discover burglars they have a kind of injured feeling you might as well have done it before they were robbed."

George smiled.

"The truth is, Mr. Brett, my saving the bank was a fluke. It was the first time in my life I had been in Eastwood at that hour."

"I really believe Mr. West and Mrs. Manders would have liked you to let the thieves go free, on condition that they gave up their jewels and furs respectively. Of course it is most unreasonable, but the missing diamonds were worth more than three thousand pounds, and Mrs. Manders is nearly ruined by her losses, so you must forgive them."

"If they only thought a minute they could see it was the police who settled things, and I could not have made such a bargain had I wished it," said George, gravely; "but, Mr. Brett, it has often crossed my mind what did become of those things."

"Hidden away securely."

"But where? Remember from the night you were robbed to the time these two men were caught was barely two months."

"Seven weeks and two days," said the Vicar, who was very exact.

"And though Eastwood is a large place it has but one railway station. Now, the porters there are ready to swear they never saw either Jeans or Newcome leave the place with luggage."

"For the matter of that," said the Vicar, drily, "the porters assert they never saw the men at all. If you are to believe the railway officials the two skilful robbers never reached Eastwood by train."

George looked at Mr. Brett gravely.

"I don't quite understand your drift, sir."

"Well, I'll put it plainly; only, Mr. Simp-

son, please remember this is between ourselves. I don't want a name for being suspicious of my fellow-creatures. Has it ever struck you that these two men always fixed on some propitious moment for their baser deeds. My house is never, as a rule, left to one woman servant. The page happened to be away on a holiday, and the cook at home alone for the first and only time. Mr. West openly confesses the assistant who sleeps on his premises had been to a party, and returned late, tired out. Mrs. Manders admits her robbery took place after the 'hands' had been up day and night pretty well to complete a mourning order; and you know yourself when the attempt was made on the bank the sub-manager, who usually slept on the premises, was absent. What do you make of all this?"

George guessed the Vicar's idea at once.

"Why the robbers, instead of coming backwards and forwards from London, were living here in our midst."

"What next?" pursued the Vicar, coolly.
"Why Eastwood people must be a worse set than I imagined to harbour them."

"Not a bit of it. Try again."

"I can't."

"Well, then, suppose—it is only an idea of mine—Mr. Jeans and his companion were so disguised that they not only lived utterly unsuspected, but that people actually took them into their confidence, and lamented to them the fears they had of being robbed."

"In that case," said George, quickly, "there must have been a sudden gap in our midst when these two men were arrested. Two citizens would have been missing at the same time."

The Vicar looked at him sharply.

"I don't know that anyone disappeared unexpectedly, but Mr. Simpson it is a known fact that a venerable gentleman became so alarmed at the repeated robberies that he warned his landlord he must move, and, I believe, paid up his rent. He did go the very day these men were arrested, but (no one else has noticed this) no one saw him go. He had farewell to no one, and did not even trouble to send his landlord the key."

George started.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "You can't mean Mr. Gregson and Moor End Cottage!"

The Vicar nodded.

"I can't stir in the matter, because all Eastwood knows I disliked the man. He came into my parish with the reputation of a missionary, and I caught him teaching boys to fight and gamble, so that I struck a bargain with him to confine his religious ministrations to places beyond Eastwood. But you are a clear-headed young man, Mr. Simpson; and I can see the coincidence between the arrest of the two burglars and the disappearance of Mr. Gregson and his servant who struck you so."

"One moment," interrupted George. "I should like to tell you that I saw Mr. Gregson once, and took an unmitigated dislike to him. There seemed something like an uncanny contrast between his fierce, passionate black eyes and his white hair, shrivelled complexion, and bowed, tottering form."

"I rather fancy," said the Vicar shrewdly, "an actor would tell you that they never selected a man with black eyes to 'make up,' as a veteran. Hair, figure, and complexion can be skilfully altered by art, but I never yet heard of any scheme for fading or quenching the fire of the eyes."

"Ah! Please go on."

"It may not seem much to you," said Mr. Brett, half apologetically, "but I own to me the proofs seem conclusive. When Mr. Gregson took possession of Moor End Cottage he had a great deal of luggage. I was at Eastwood station the day he arrived, and I assure you that the old man and his servant had boxes enough for a large family. Where are they now?"

"I suppose they took them away?"

"No human creature saw Mr. Gregson depart," resumed the Vicar. "From the time he left Mr. Fletcher, after paying his rent and

giving notice, all clue to him fails. My own idea is that the raid on the bank was meant for the last of the Eastwood robberies, and that in their assumed characters of Mr. Gregson and his servant Messrs. Jeans and Newcome would have left the town openly the next day."

George looked puzzled.

"Admitting for a moment that these burglars were the occupants of Moor End Cottage, surely, leaving it as they did suddenly, there would have been some traces of disorder? Mr. Fletcher has often told me how beautifully neat he found everything."

"Yes; but remember the risks they run. Depend upon it the cottage was left always ready for inspection. If they had secrets at Moor End they knew how to hide them. It is strange the secret, mysterious life the two men led. Neither master nor servant was ever known to buy a thing and have it sent home. They carried everything with them."

"They could not carry chais!" objected George Simpson.

"They never had any."

"But the cooking—the cleaning?"

"They never had any cooking. Such things as they could not buy ready for eating they went without. They always dined at the hotel. As to cleaning, an old woman was had in once a week to scrub the house from top to toe. She told me herself she did not like the job, because that blackmoor, as she called the servant, never left her alone, but followed her about from room to room. I think the poor old soul fancied he suspected her of dishonesty."

George felt more impressed than he cared to own.

"I wish we did not live in Moor End Cottage. I don't like to think of my wife being alone there."

"These men are likely to be kept in darkness until safe enough," said Mr. Brett, kindly. "Besides, I may be mistaken. Even if I am right, there is no chance of their being free to return to the cottage for years."

"No," said George, in a low tone. "But what if they have left their plunder behind them—the boxes you spoke of, the spoil from your house, and the other dwellings they robbed? How if they have a secret hiding-place at Moor End Cottage, where their ill-gotten gains are safely deposited?"

Mr. Brett looked up quickly.

"I believe they have."

George started.

"That is why I spoke to you," went on the Vicar. "I felt you would not scoff at my suspicions, and if there is any hiding place of that sort at Moor End Cottage you would be sure to find it out."

George looked as though he did not like the task.

"I think Mr. Fletcher would have been the right person for you to confide in," he said, rather stiffly.

"I know my man," replied the Vicar, good-humouredly. "Fletcher would have flown into a passion at first in defence of his friend—Gregson was a friend of his—and then come round suddenly to my idea, and waited to pull the cottage down by way of apology. No, Mr. Simpson, if anything is to be discovered you are the man."

"And the trial?"

The Vicar shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mind telling you that I got an interview with the prisoners, and taxed them with being the late tenants of Moor End Cottage, and leaving stolen property behind them. They took it very coolly—told me I had better go to Mr. Fletcher for permission to search the cottage, and that they felt it rather a compliment than otherwise to be mistaken for two such virtuous people as the old missionary and his devoted servant."

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

PENAL servitude for ten years.
This was the sentence passed on Emilia

Jeans and Gustavus Newcome for their raid on the Vicarage, their attempted robbery of the Eastwood bank, and their brutal attack on Sergeant Martin and George Simpson. There was no doubt in any local mind that they amply deserved their punishment; but still that peculiar delusion hankered in the breast of Mr. West, Mrs. Manders, and the despoiled residents that some effort might have been made to recover from the delinquents at least a portion of the stolen property.

In vain a learned barrister, whose opinion the jeweller took, pointed out that, though in the heat of the moment Jeans and Newcome had confessed themselves the culprits—and the Vicar's cook had identified one of them as the man who dragged her, there was not one article of evidence to connect them with the other robberies, and it was simply useless to press the charge, as no jury would convict on the rash confession so immediately retracted. The victims held their own opinion still, and always felt the bank had had far better luck than it deserved.

As for George Simpson, he often wished the Vicar had not made that strange communication to him; for, try as he would, he could not get it out of his head.

Moor End Cottage was a perfect gem of beauty as the spring and summer advanced, but its master's enjoyment of it was poisoned by the idea that it might be the depository of stolen treasures. He did not trouble himself much as to what might happen when the two culprits were set at large. Ten years hence was too far off to alarm him; but night and day he was haunted by the thought that Jeans and Newcome might have had a third confederate, who knew of their plunder and its hiding-place. George had gone quite over to the opinion that Mr. Gregson and his servant were identical with the two convicts. Any doubt he might have had vanished after an interview with the old woman who had acted as their cleaner and factotum.

"Bless you, sir," she said emphatically, "dear Mr. Gregson was imposed on. That there blackamoor gave himself the airs of a prince, and did just what he liked when his master's back was turned. He'd eat the nicest things, and drink whisky by the tumblerful (good Mr. Gregson was a teetotaller). I up and told of him once, but the dear man only sighed, and said he was a brand must be plucked from the burning. He was a saint."

Summer had come and gone. Autumn had come, bringing the anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Simpson's engagement. There seemed every chance of a newcomer's arrival at Moor End Cottage before October was over. Doris went out for very few walks in these days, and spent most of her time sitting in the garden admiring the rich late autumn flowers.

"There never was a prettier house than Moor End Cottage," she said to George one Saturday afternoon, when, the bank closing at two, he was free to spend his time in gardening.

Mr. Simpson agreed. He had never told his wife his own suspicions of the cottage's former occupants. Doris was pointing out to him the beauty of the rich, late dahlias, still a mass of brilliant bloom, and said presently,—

"They are said to grow so well because the well was just underneath; but Mrs. Fletcher told me last time she came that that had nothing to do with it. She said the well was so deep that, after it was drained and emptied, they had to have the entrance bricked up, because it seemed hopeless to think of filling it up. Her mother always had something very bright growing on the top to prevent anyone taking a fancy to dig down deep, and so interfere with the well."

George did not seem to pay much attention at the time. He went on talking to Doris of other things. But the strangest idea had come into his mind; and when Sister Sarah dropped in to spend an hour or so with Doris—a habit she had fallen into since Mrs. George Simp-

son had become a stay-at-home—he left his wife in her care, and went back to the garden to the site of the disused well.

It was some distance from the house, and not overlooked by any of the windows. George remembered, when they first came to Moor End Cottage, that particular plot of earth had been the only one showing signs of recent cultivation. The gardener Mr. Simpson had employed declared the last tenant had made no preparations for the spring sowing except in that one square bed (as he called it).

"Suppose we meant to plant something special here, and so got it ready," the man observed, critically; "but bless me, he might as well have had an eye to the rest of the garden. This has been dug and manured, and dug and watered till the soil's the richest in the place. We'll keep it for dahlias by your leave, sir. It always was dahlias in the old lady's time, and the spot suits them."

The dahlias had done credit to the careful preparation of the soil. They were quite a sight, so luxuriant was their growth, and yet George Simpson, by nature a flower lover, set himself deliberately to destroy their beauty. He fetched a spade and dug up every one of the plants by the roots. Not content with this he went on with his work until a large hole yawned, where only two hours before the bright autumn flowers had bloomed. Suddenly George felt his spade come in contact with some hard, wooden substance. He dug a few minutes more, and then looked carefully down. There, about three feet below the surface, was a firm layer of wood, not brick, as Mrs. Simpson had said, but a large flat boarding, on which the rich soil so admired by the gardener had been carefully arranged.

The servant, coming from the house with a message, was astonished to see her master with hands and clothes stained with mould, and the perspiration standing on his face in great beads.

"It's the Vicar come to call, sir. Mistress thought you would like to know."

"Ask the Vicar to come here," said George, simply. "Tell him I have something to show him in the garden."

"What in the world are you about?" asked Mr. Brett, when he reached the spot, following Mary's direction, and telling the damsel she need not attend him. "Have you lost some pet animal that you are digging a grave?"

"I am opening a grave, not making one," said George, gravely. "Mr. Brett, I am thankful for the chance that brings you here at the moment when I believe I have discovered Mr. Gregson's hidden treasure."

The Vicar said never a word, but he quietly fetched a barrow from the tool shed, and began filling it with the uprooted plants and loose mould which were hindering George's movements.

"I never thought of this," he said, slowly, when at last they had disclosed a large round slab of wood. "You are sharper than I am after all. Shall I help you to raise it?"

It took all their strength to raise the slab or cover. They then found it had hidden a large round hole, whose mouth had been filled up to within twenty feet of the top with bricks. From the ending of the bricks to within a few inches of the cover the contents of this hiding-place were of the most motley description.

Several leather cases, such as jewellers use, two tin boxes hermetically sealed, various unshapely bundles wrapped in wash-leather, one of which the Vicar handled with an air of appropriation, saying quietly,—

"And these are West's jewels, and most likely one of these tin boxes contains Mrs. Manders' furs."

"What are we to do next?" asked George.

"It was a clever scheme," said Mr. Brett, slowly. "They must have known someone familiar with Eastwood, and heard of Mrs. Hilton's well. After her daughter married Mr. Fletcher at his advice she had it drained and emptied, and gave orders for it to be

'filled up.' The last process took so much more material than she expected that she had it stopped some feet from the top, and the wooden cover made and screwed down. Those scoundrels knew this, and that if the screws were removed and care taken against damp and rain the top of the well would be a safe hiding-place for the spoil of a dozen burglaries. But who in the world told them of the place?"

It was discovered afterwards that a girl who had been in Mrs. Hilton's service became Jean's wife. She, poor creature, was dead and gone before he made use of her artless reminiscences.

A law exists that half of any treasure trove should go to the Crown; but the chief legal authority of the district decided that the accumulations found by George Simpson were not treasure trove in the ordinary sense of the word, since it represented the property stolen from private individuals within a year; and therefore everything was restored, so far as it was possible to trace it, to its former owner.

The Vicar got back his plate and presentation inkstand, Mrs. Manders her furs, and, in short, all the despoiled inhabitants of Eastwood had their property restored to them; and Mr. Fletcher took great credit to himself for offering his cottage to George Simpson, from which lucky chance he declared the discovery arose.

A very great deal has been written about ingratitude, but the inhabitants of Eastwood proved themselves quite above such a failing; for the first desire of the people whose property he had saved was to make Mr. Simpson a fitting present, and they were much disconcerted when he declined to accept anything at all.

However, about that time he received a present from another source—a bright and healthy baby boy—on which occasion the Eastwood folks decided that they would bestow upon the child a most gorgeous christening gift in remembrance of his father's genius. They kept the secret most carefully from the persons most concerned; but on the day of Archie Elton Simpson's becoming a Christian there arrived at Moor End Cottage a deputation, conveying a drinking mug of solid silver, with spoon, fork and knife of the same precious metal, all inscribed with the young Christian's name, and with the arms of the town of Eastwood. And Mrs. George Simpson opined that to refuse the offering would be both ungracious and unkind, so that they were gratefully accepted, and the deputation invited to a private view of Archie Elton Simpson's pectoral.

"You may say what you like," declared Mr. Fletcher to his wife that night at dinner, "but the beginning of Simpson's luck was my offering him Moor End Cottage."

George himself would have said that the beginning of "Simpson's luck" was his meeting with Doris Elton. The young couple remained at Moor End Cottage until Archie was two years old, when, to the great regret of Eastwood (which still loves to relate their adventures) they migrated to London, for the poor sad-eyed lady whom Doris had pitied at Hastings was a widow. Sir Edmund had followed his eight children to the grave, and his nephew, the *civilians* bank clerk, was Sir George, a powerful baronet, and the master of Lynfield Castle and the stately house in Park-lane.

The Fletchers have visited Doris and her husband in both places, and they returned, bringing such brilliant accounts of all they had seen and enjoyed, that all their friends in Eastwood believe more fully than ever in Simpson's Luck.

[THE END.]

A lion has been known to leave a tooth mark on a solid iron bar.

ALL IN A FLAT.

—o—

THERE was an unexpected pause in the music. The orchestra, playing the overture to a new operetta, passed abruptly from a crashing, soul-stirring march to a tender serenade, and it was just at the moment of transition that the attendant had shown Mr. Lisle the seats to which his tickets entitled him.

The theatre was so full that many persons were unable to get seats, and every one was anticipating a pleasant evening.

As Violet Lisle and her guest, Ethel Scott, stood in the entry, waiting for the older members of their party to take their seats, they both saw Lionel West bending his tall figure over the seat near which they stood.

They both noticed that he was talking earnestly and confidentially to a very beautiful girl, who was seemingly not averse to his attentions; and just as that abrupt change in the music came they both distinctly heard him say,—

"Sweet one!"

Of course, one don't usually use such tender terms in theatre; but he spoke almost in a whisper, and that march had been so noisy!

Violet shrugged her shoulders, and glanced contemptuously at Ethel; but neither of them turned their heads to look at Mr. West when presently they passed in front of him and took their seats.

This was Ethel's first visit to London, the first time she had ever been to a large, first-class theatre, and the first time she had ever heard an operetta sung by a good company, and she had looked forward to this evening with great eagerness.

Who could have supposed that the utterance of two words would have made such a difference? For after hearing them there was, to her, neither harmony nor wit nor gaiety in the play.

"Someone must be very much in love to say 'sweet one' in so public a place. Don't you think so?" whispered Violet to Ethel, presently.

"Isn't that one of your London ways?" Ethel asked, smiling.

"Nonsense! You know it isn't. How you do like to pretend you are 'green,' just because you've never been here before!" Violet answered, with a good-natured laugh.

"Do you know who that lady is?"

"I know her by sight only. She is Nannie Elton. She lives in Bath, but visits her aunt, across the street from us, very often. She is immensely rich, and consequently is much sought after, though she is a terrible blue-stocking."

Why did not Violet add—which was true—that Nannie was engaged to an officer, and was soon to be married?

Because she herself had designs on Lionel West, and did not want her pretty guest to interfere with her plans!

"It must be nice to be so rich," said the country doctor's daughter, sighing.

"That is what Lionel West thinks. That is the man who was uttering such sweet speeches to her. He is a musician, plays the organ at St. Alphege Church, and is very popular in society—quite run after, in fact. But he is not a bit vain."

"I know him—slightly."

"Why, Ethel!" her friend exclaimed, with well-simulated surprise. Are you sure? Where could you have met him?"

"One of his cousins—Dr. Herbert West—was in Warwick last summer. He was thinking of going into partnership with papa, so he boarded with us, and this Mr. West visited him," Ethel explained, innocently. "I thought I told you about him. He gave me lessons on the piano while he was with us."

"How odd that you never alluded to him in your letters!" answered Violet, carelessly. "You will probably meet him to-morrow, for we dine with Mrs. Elton, Nannie's aunt. As matters seem to have gone pretty far be-

tween those two, of course he'll be one of the guests. Ah, the curtain is going up. Now for a good time!"

Lionel West had spent more than one week at Dr. Scott's house in Warwick, and at first Ethel had alluded to him more than once in her frequent letters to her old schoolmate.

Her allusions to him had been such that Violet became jealous, and determined to have Ethel visit her as soon as possible, that she might see for herself whether the girl's simple charms had made any impression on the hitherto unattached young musician, or whether his adamantine heart had succumbed at last.

As for his seeming devotion to Nannie Elton that did not worry her. She understood it thoroughly. But to think that her schemes had been aided by Ethel herself seeing and hearing this apparent love-making made her almost beside herself with joy.

Lionel was at Mrs. Elton's dinner party, and acted as if he were more than pleased to meet Ethel once more. So, too, did his cousin, the doctor, who was also there.

"Miss Scott and your cousin seem to be delighted to be together again," Violet said to Lionel, who sat next her at the table.

"Yes. But you know Herbert was at Dr. Scott's all the summer, and—"

"Oh, don't I know?" Violet interrupted him, smiling significantly. "Weren't all her letters full of him? You know she and I were chums at boarding-school, so of course we were very intimate. I told her yesterday I thought it was so odd that she never mentioned your visit there. As we used to go to St. Alphege Church, one would naturally suppose we might know you."

Lionel stared blankly at her for a moment; then he added,—

"Do you think she—she cares for Herbert?"

"What a question! Do you suppose I'd tell of it if she did? Do you think I can't keep a secret? Dr. Herbert is not said to be engaged to anyone else, I hope?"

Lionel had to confess that he was not; and Violet, happy in having put barrier between him and Ethel, tried to make herself so agreeable that he would turn to her, now that her friend was out of the running.

Ethel remained in London only two weeks. She wrote a private letter to her mother, saying she was home-sick (poor girl), and asking that she might be sent for on some plausible excuse.

During those two weeks Ethel and Lionel never met, save in a crowd. Violet looked out for that! And perhaps the latter's efforts to heal the musician's wounded heart would have succeeded had her guest gone home just one day sooner than she did.

The last day of her stay in the city Ethel went to make a farewell call on Mrs. Elton and Nannie, who had taken a great fancy to her.

"I should be very sorry you were not going to remain longer here," Nannie said, cordially. "If I were not going home myself next week. Is your father planning to attend that medical congress which takes place at Bath next month?"

"Yes, I think he is."

"Then do come with him and make me a little visit—do, there's a dear! I am sure you and mamma would be the best of friends!"

"Thank you——"

"Now, don't say 'thank you' so politely," urged Nannie, laughing; "for I fear you mean 'thank you, no!' We have a pleasant flat, with an extra bedroom, which is a great luxury in a flat, you know."

"No, I don't know! I never visited any one in a flat; and, to tell the truth, I am curious to see one."

"Lucky girl! I suppose every family in Warwick has a house to itself? Well, we don't. We live in Queen Mary-street, and as there is another family of Eltons in our house, I have to impress on every one the sentimental fact that I am suite one."

"Sweet ones?"

"Yes; our block has twenty suites of apartments, and the Eltons who do not belong to my family live in suite ten. The crankiest old bachelor you ever heard of lives in 'suite sixteen,' so we have many a joke over it. You know Lionel West, of course? Well, he isn't a bit quick to take a joke, and when I was talking to him in the theatre one night, giving him my address, I added that I was suite one, and he repeated it as mystified as you please."

A dash of intelligence unintentionally darted into Ethel's eyes.

Nannie saw it, and at once said to herself, —

"Aha! I see now why Lionel West has been so glum. He told me he was well acquainted with Ethel, and now I remember that she sat in front of me at the theatre that night, and perhaps she misunderstood what he said."

Although Nannie knew that Lionel was to call at three o'clock to take her to an organ recital, and it was now half-past two, she chatted eagerly and merrily to Ethel, and when Lionel entered the parlour she was still there.

"Ah, you have come in the nick of time, Mr. West!" said good-natured Nannie. "Miss Scott and I have such a good joke at—well, I don't know exactly at whose expense it is, but you'll enjoy it."

"Not at my expense, I trust?" he said, with a smile.

"I'll leave you to judge. In Warwick, as you know, people do not have to live in flats; so Miss Scott was quite puzzled when, in giving her my address, I added that I was suite one. She misunderstood me just as you did, that night when she heard you say, 'suite one' to me at the theatre, and though she will not own it I'm sure she thought us a little crazy."

Lionel looked eagerly at Ethel, who blushed and dropped her eyes.

Nannie continued to chatter until the two had somewhat recovered self-possession; and when Ethel at last rose to take her leave, and Lionel started off with her, Nannie never thought about that organ recital, nor did he.

Hardly had the lovers got fairly into the street before Lionel exclaimed,—

"Oh, Ethel, how could you believe that I would say 'sweet one' to any girl but you?"

When they were married, a few weeks later, Nannie's gift to the bride was a silver tea-service. On the sugar bowl she caused to be engraved, instead of name or initial, the mystifying words, "Suite One!"

THE invention of smokeless powder has been followed by a counter invention in the shape of a "smoke rocket," to be used to screen the advance of a body of troops. It has been tried with success.

The Royal plate of England is a treasury in itself, comprising several hundred pieces of gold and silver, and of inestimable value. It is kept in several strong rooms, in glass cases behind iron bars, and can only be seen by persons who have obtained permits after proper identification. Part is at Windsor, part in the Tower of London, where are also the Crown jewels, and the eye is fairly dazzled by the abundance of wealth. Plates of gold, richly chased; plates of silver, beautifully engraved; platters, with appropriate mottoes; vases, pitchers, goblets, centre-pieces, knives, forks, spoons of unique shape and rich ornamentation.

PASTEUR is a dreamy, absent-minded man, and it is said of him that he would never think of dining unless reminded of the necessity of taking food. On the very morning of his marriage he forgot all about the approaching ceremony, and went off to his laboratory in Strasburg University. The bride and her attendants went up to the church, but no Pasteur turned up. A search was instituted, and Pasteur was found deep in chemical experiments, and utterly oblivious of the fact that he was to be made a Benedict that day.

FACETIE.

HAILSTONES intended for publication are usually as big as hen's eggs.

THERE is no luck in a horseshoe unless it happens to be on the horse that wins.

MARRIAGE is a lottery in which we all draw something—usually a baby carriage.

WHEN were the first sweetmeats made? When Noah preserved pairs in the ark.

SOME people have faces as long as Jacob's ladder, and the angels are missing.

WHEN a mean man wants to say a mean thing, and is a coward, he writes a letter.

NEVER borrow trouble. The interest you have to pay for the accommodation is excessive.

WE are all contented to be called sinners so long as the parson does not descend to particulars.

FIRST VISITOR (at realistic wax figure show): "Are you wax?" SECOND VISITOR: "No; are you?"

"WHICH is the best position in which to sleep?" asked a patient. "I usually lie down," replied the doctor.

ELsie: "Did you know papa well before you married him, mamma?" Mother (sadly): "No, dear, I didn't."

WHENEVER you find a man who is a failure, you will also find a patient little woman who makes his excuses in the world.

ONE day of sickness will do more to convince a young man that his mother is his best friend than seventeen volumes of proverbs.

If you want to know why Eve ate the apple just analyse your own feelings when you see a "Keep off the Grass" notice.

OLD MILLION: "My dear Miss Youngthing, if you'd only marry me I could die happy." Miss Youngthing: "Why, Mr. Million, if you were dying I'd marry you in a minute."

I AM to tell the truth," said a man. "Yes," interrupted an acquaintance, "and you are probably the worst shot in the neighbourhood."

MAN of the house to the Pedlar: "Get out of here, or I'll whistle for the dog." Pedlar: "Well, now, wouldn't you like to buy a nice vestie?"

FOND MOTHER: "Is blowing a French-horn likely to result in injury to my boy?" Doctor: "You can wager it is ma'am, if he blows it near us and we catch him."

HEAD OF THE ESTABLISHMENT: "David, you are a fool!" David: "Well, sir, I can't help it. When you engaged me, you told me to imitate you, and I've done the best I could."

WICKERS: "They tell me, professor, that you have mastered all the modern tongues?" Prof. Polyglot: "All but two—my wife's and her mother's."

TEACHER (at Sunday School): "Betty, what have we to do first, before we can expect for, giveness for our sins?" Betty: "We have to sin first."

BRONSON: "What a heavy shower. It is raining cats and dogs." Amy (quizzingly): "What kind of dogs does it rain, Mrs. Bronson?" Bronson: "Skye terriers, probably."

WIFE: "This coffee is horrible. I must discharge the cook." By the way, what do you mean by saying the coffee is splendid?" Husband: "I thought you made it."

PAPA, what is a savage?" "A savage, my son, is a man who occupies two whole seats in a railway-car, while some poor woman with a sick baby has to stand up."

SEASIDE flirtations do not generally last, possibly because, like the houses mentioned in the parable, they are generally built on the sand.

A FLIRTING woman can cause more trouble to mankind than a devastating army, but she is very much older than the devastating army, after all.

"JANE, who is that girl that just left the kitchen?" Jane: "Oh, ma'am, that's the lady what works for the woman across the street."

The bishop who has taken the ballot under his episcopal countenance and discountenance was asked if he considered dancing a sin. "Yes," was his reply, "if you dance badly."

"By the way, how is Higgins? I heard he was at death's door." "I don't know about that, but the last time I saw him he was on the step pulling the doctor's bell."

He Dim.—Fond Wife: "Do you think of me often, Henry, when you are away?" Traveling Man: "Yes, often when I get into the hotel late at night—with a sigh of relief."

"It's hotter than—" began the deacon, when the minister interrupted him with "S-h-h." But the deacon wouldn't be bluffed. "It's hotter than yesterday," he added.

LITTLE GIRL: "Papa, Dick found a horseshoe, and I found a four-leaved clover. Which of us is the luckiest?" Practical Pa: "Dick is. Horseshoes are worth money."

CHEBORGHMAN: (sarcastically, to agnostic): "I suppose you call yourself a searcher after truth?" Agnostic: "Yes, that is what I call myself; but I don't find much."

FRIEND: "My young man, you play that concert as if you were paid for it." Boy: "I am." Friend: "How's that?" Boy: "Mother pays me to play it when she isn't at home."

REV. MR. BECKER says: "Pick out the worst, the meanest, the dirtiest reason in the crowd—bad as he is, there is within him a pearl." Perhaps so; but it is safe to say that there is more beer than pearl.

"DIDN'T you know Paddy O'Callahan was dead?" "No!—sure, when did he die?" "More'n two weeks ago." "Waal, the loikes of 'im—an' niver let his best friend know wan word of it."

PRISON WARDEN (to new prisoner): "We always like to assign the prisoners to the trades with which they are most familiar, and shall be happy to do so in your case." Prisoner: "I am a commercial traveller."

LECTURE UPON THE RHINOCEROS.—Professor: "I must beg you to give me your undivided attention. It is absolutely impossible that you can form an idea of this hideous animal unless you keep your eyes fixed on me."

Mrs. Brown: "Mrs. B.'s husband died only three weeks ago, and yet she goes to the opera already." Mrs. Smythe: "That's nothing; she is so deaf she can't hear a single note."

LITTLE MABEL described graphically her sensation on striking a dimpled elbow on the bed-carving. "Oh, my!" she sighed, "mamma, I've struck my arm just where it makes stars in my fingers."

BEEF they are married she will carefully turn down his coat-collar when it gets awry; but, afterwards, she'll jerk it down into position as if she was throwing a door-mat out of the window.

THESE are two things which will make us happy in this world if we attend to them. The first is never to vex ourselves about what we cannot help, and the second is never to vex ourselves about what we can help.

YOUNG BLINKINS: "I understand, Miss Esmeralda, that your brother Tom is becoming an artist. Does he draw well?" Esmeralda: "I reckon so. He drew a turkey at a raffle one day last week."

THE Western custom of dancing was described as follows by an Oriental observer: "The sahibs run the mame and the nieghs round to make them hot, and then pull them round to cool them down."

Mrs. PRY (to applicant for a tenement): "Does your husband stay out late at night?" Applicant: "He does." Mrs. P.: "Very late?" A.: "Yes, very late." Mrs. P. (with a roar of her head): "What belongs to a club, I suppose?" A. (calmly): "No, the club belongs to him. He's a policeman."

AN UNSELFISH FRIEND.—Bronson: "What an unselfish man Brown is! Always sacrificing himself for the sake of some friend." Parker: "Why, he's just run away with Tim Honpeck's wife."

LIMBS (to sister Edith, draping a wicker figure with experimental arrangements): "It's no use, Edie, you'd better give it up. Babies are coming in!" Edith (thinking): "Ah! there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will!"

"Did any man ever kiss you before, darling?" "Before—today? No, Edward, you are the first." And the recording angel didn't need to drop a tear to blot out the fib, for he was the first that had kissed her that day.

WIFE: "The twentieth of November we shall celebrate our silver wedding. Don't you think we ought to kill the fat pig and have a feast?" Husband: "Kill the pig! I don't see how how the unfortunate animal is to blame for what happened twenty-five years ago."

FOR A FEW MINUTES.—He: "How I wish I could be a boy again." She: "If you love me as you say, you ought to be pretty well contented with your present condition." He: "Oh, I just wanted to be a boy long enough to have a round or two with that little brother of yours."

"DO YOU take many periodicals?" asked a young minister on his first visit to one of his parishioners. "Oh, no, sir," replied the good woman; "I never do, but I'm sorry to say that my husband takes a periodical about once in every two months. I wish you could induce him to sign the pledge."

THE time may come when polities will mean all that is noble and good; when a small boy will break an apple in two and give his little sister the biggest half; when a stamp will work, and a stray dog won't bite; but the day will never dawn when a fly can tickle a drowsy man's nose without making him jump.

THE marriage wasn't a month old, and the young bride and her visiting mother sat watching the clock work toward midnight. "What is that heavy, broken, uncertain footstep coming up the stairs?" said the mother-in-law, sternly. "I guess it's George, mamma. You know he always stutters, and here of late it seems to have got somehow into his walk."

KOSCUSKUS MCREARY: "How do you like Miss Jones? In my opinion she is not only handsome, but very intelligent." Gus da Smith: "I agree with you as far as her looks are concerned, but she is not intelligent. I've been courting her for the last six months, and I don't think, from the way she acts, that she has found it out yet."

A TEACHER in a high school was very particular about keeping all his pupils fully employed during their study hours. One day, on looking around the room, he observed some pupils unoccupied, whereupon, assigning them a task, he quoth for their benefit the proverb: "When the devil finds a man idle, he sets him at work." It was not long before the pupils began to see the joke. First a smile, then another, then a giggle, then a laugh, and before long everybody was laughing aloud at the expense of the master, who could do no better than to chime in.

A BOTANIST took a party of ladies and gentlemen over his grounds, pointing out the rarest among his plants and flowers, and explaining their virtues. One of the visitors was an elderly miss, who appeared to take infinite delight in chiding whenever she had a chance, that the plants and flowers in her own garden were at least as beautiful as those in the botanist's. Just as they were passing a giant cactus, she exclaimed: "Oh, that is nothing extraordinary. I have a much larger cactus at home. Indeed, I planted it myself." "How strange!" the professor observed. "This plant is already sixty-three years old, and if you're still larger." Here the lady closed the subject.

SOCIETY.

PRINCESS Louise is suffering from neuralgia and sleeplessness, and is ordered perfect quiet and rest for a while.

No man worth marrying is ever infatuated with the mazoline girl who talks slang.

VELVETS are going to be very much worn; indeed, the new style of dress will necessitate good rich materials, rich brocades, and some new fabrics rather like the old matassé.

It is said that the little King of Spain is really far more delicate than is allowed. His little face is wan and unchildlike; he is already inured to suffering, while his poor mother never knows an easy hour.

WOMEN have recently been admitted into Greenwich Observatory, and four have joined the staff of the Astronomer Royal. Their duties will require their attendance at all hours of the night.

There is still another fashion novelty which is condemned by women who look upon life seriously. It is known as the necklace "Panchinello ruff," or "Toby's frill," and looks for all the world like a diminutive specimen of the ruff worn by Queen Elizabeth when in full regalia.

The Divine service which the Queen attends when in Scotland is of the simplest and most earnest character. Her Majesty takes part with equal fervour in the more ornate services of the Episcopal Church in the South. The Queen shows in every way that her religious feeling is inherent and in no way dependent on mere surroundings.

The Emperor William never loses time, and the Berlin Mint is busily engaged in coining money for German East Africa. The value of each piece is about a mark and a half. On one side is the bust of the Emperor in the uniform of the Guards, and on the other a lion.

The Prince of Wales enjoys the reputation of being a good landlord at Sandringham. The peasants' cottages are of a model kind, and their owners, who work on the estate, are allowed ample time to cultivate their own garden. As little as possible is done on Sunday by any of the workpeople.

King Haemus is about the only monarch who lives within the amount allowed him by the civil list, and occasionally even he overdoes the limit. For instance, last year the royal household was allowed 15,350,000 francs, and the King spent 15,349,999 francs and ninety-two centimes. This left him a cent and three-quarters to his credit.

The Czar has sent the Emperor William a troika, or three-horse carriage, along with a team to draw the vehicle, and a Russian coachman and groom, arrayed in their national costume. The three horses are harnessed abreast, the centre one trotting between the shafts, while the others gallop. A troika is driven at full speed, and the coachman labours his team without mercy, and yells like an escaped Bedlamite. The carriage, therefore, goes over the steppes like wildfire, the sole object being to make the horses proceed at their utmost speed. How a troika can ever be driven along German roads it is impossible to conjecture; but the arrival of the vehicle has caused considerable alarm in the court circles at Berlin and Potsdam, as it is feared that the Emperor will attempt to drive the troika himself, in which case he will certainly break his neck.

One reason for the provision of a London home for the Duke and Duchess of Connaught is, that it is thought the Duke of Clarence will never be strong enough to sustain the perpetual round of public functions which has fallen to the lot of the Prince of Wales during the past thirty years or so, as it is feared that Prince Albert Victor will prove the delicate one of the Royal Family.

STATISTICS.

THERE ARE 16,000,000 people in Great Britain under fifteen years of age.

NEARLY a ton of railway tickets was issued from Euston Station the last week in July.

It is said that two persons playing dominoes ten hours a day could continue for 118,000,000 years without exhausting all possible combinations.

On the entire human race 500,000,000 are well clothed, that is, they wear garments of some kind; 250,000,000 habitually go naked, and 700,000,000 only cover parts of the body; 500,000,000 live in houses, 700,000,000 in huts and caves, and 250,000,000 virtually have no shelter.

GEMS.

If we are not willing to do little things, we can never hope to do great ones.

How much pleasanter it would be to recall the happy days of our youth if it didn't remind us so forcibly that we are growing old.

If a man does not make new friendships as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man should keep his friendship in constant repair.

No human being can be isolated and self-sustained. The strongest and bravest and most helpful have acknowledged or acknowledged to themselves moments of hungry soul-yearnings for companionship and sympathy.

Beware of the man who tells you of his wife's faults. Beware of the woman who announces to you that life is without flavour, and that if she had only known you before she did John, well—then, of course, it would have been different.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PICKLED PEARS.—Peel the pears, cut in halves and core. To five and a half pounds of pears take a quart of vinegar and two pounds of sugar; add lemon peel, cinnamon and cloves. Cook the sugar and vinegar till it froths, then add the spices and pears. Cook till tender, then remove from stove and put in jars.

TO COOK PEARS BROWN.—Peel some good pears, cut in halves and remove the cores. Place them in water. Then put a piece of butter and some sugar into a baking pan; take the pears out of the water and lay them in the pan without adding water. Eat them, cook slowly, and sprinkle sugar over them when brown.

WINEY PUDDING.—Two eggs, flour, butter, sugar, jam, carbonate soda. Take two eggs, with their weight in butter and flour, and the weight of one egg in sugar. Put the butter and sugar in a basin and heat them to a cream, add the eggs and beat smooth; then add the flour, in which should be mixed half a teaspoonful of strawberry or raspberry jam; pour into a butter mould, which cover with a piece of greased paper, and steam gently for an hour and a half. Then turn out and serve with arrowroot sauce.

MUSHROOM KETCHUP.—Basket of mushrooms, salt, cloves, mustard-seed, allspice, black pepper, ginger. Wash and pick the mushrooms, and sprinkle with salt in proportion of quarter pound of salt to three pounds of mushrooms. Stir occasionally for two or three days. Squeeze out the juice, and to each quart of juice add half a teaspoonful each of cloves and mustard, and of allspice, black pepper, and ginger three-quarters of a teaspoonful each. Put all into a covered jar, and allow it to heat gently till it reaches boiling point. Leave it so for a fortnight, and strain through muslin, and bottle. Should it show any appearance of spoiling, boil up once more with a little rice and salt.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ALL physicians claim that brain work is twice as exhausting as that of the muscles. If the eight-hour rule for manual labour is enforced brain workers will be entitled to claim a reduction to four hours.

A SCIENTIST computes that with the aid of a machine constructed on the principle of the boring, drilling and pumping apparatus of the mosquito, a hole could be bored to the centre of the earth in less than a day.

It is not generally known that a single mouse turned loose in a grocery window will catch more flies in a single evening than fly paper catches all day. The rodent is also a good roach executioner.

RUSSIANS dress recent wounds with a thick layer of ashes, prepared by the burning of cotton or linen stuff. This simple, effective, and convenient method has been practised from time immemorial by the Russian peasantry.

The highest church spire in the world has just been completed. It is that of the cathedral at Ulm, Wurtemberg, and is 530 feet high. The top of the spires on the dome of St. Peter's, Rome, is 418 feet above the pavement.

This has been one of the most fruitless years we have had for a long time. There are no native apples to be obtained worth the eating, and the supply of foreign apples falls short of that of previous years. Pears are dear, and, as a rule, tasteless.

In several regiments of the Servian Army there is a curious system. The drums instead of being carried by men who beat them, are placed on a cart, drawn by a dog trained for this purpose. The drummers walk behind the cart and beat the roll of the drum while marching.

Those who desire to rescue the drunkard from his cups will find no better substitute for spirits than strong new-made coffee without milk or sugar. Two ounces of coffee, or one-eighth of a pound, to one pint of boiling water makes a first-class beverage; but the water must be boiling, not merely hot.

PHYSICIANS say that cases of nervous prostration are less frequent since low heels have come into fashion. They allow the whole weight of the body to rest on the feet, remove the tension to which the muscles are subjected by high-heels, and keep the salt of the leg in its normal condition.

COMMON snails are often on sale at Covent Garden, where they are purchased by French, Austrian, and Italian residents; but it is said to be a mistake to suppose that they are universally despised as diet by the English. In Staffordshire and other parts of the country many of the population are stated to enjoy them.

"We have had the language of the eyes, fan, flowers, handkerchiefs, and parasols, and now a language of 'bathing' has been invented for lovers in Italy. Thus—To remain in one place means, 'You court me in vain.' To take a header, 'I'd defy death for you.' To swim in haste, 'Follow me.' To rest on one side, 'You have struck my heart.' To swim towards the sun, 'I do not fear your love.' To dive, 'I'm going mad for you.'"

TASTE is not equally distributed over the whole surface of the tongue. There are three distinct regions or tracts, each of which has to perform its own special office or function. The tip of the tongue is concerned mainly with pungent and acid tastes; the middle portion is sensitive chiefly to sweets or bitterness, while the back or lower portion confines itself entirely to the flavours of rich, fatty substances. This subdivision of faculties in the tongue makes each piece of food undergo these separate examinations, which must be successively passed before it is admitted into full participation in the human economy.

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SOMETHING GREAT.

The trial was ended—the vigil past;
All clad in his arms was the knight at last,
The goodliest knight in the whole wide land,
With face that shone with a purple glow,
The king looked on him with gracious eyes,
And said, "He is meet for some high enterprise."
To himself he thought, "I will conquer fate—
I will surely die or do something great."

So, fresh from the palace he rode away;
There was trouble and need in the town that day;
A child had strayed from his mother's side
Into the woodland dark and wide.
"Help! help!" cried the mother, with sorrow wild—
"Help me, sir knight, to seek my child!
The hungry wolves in the forest roam;
Help me to bring my lost ones home!"

He shook her hand from his bridle rein;
"Alas! poor mother, you ask in vain;
Some meane succour will do, maybe,
Some squire or valet of low degree.
There are mighty wrongs in the world to right;
I keep my sword for a noble fight;
I am sad at heart for your baby's fate,
But I ride in haste to do something great."

One wintry night when the sun had set,
A blind man by the way he met;
"Now, good sir knight, for our Lady's sake,
On the sightless wanderer pity take!
The wind blows cold and the sun is down;
Lead me, I pray, till I reach the town."
"Nay," said the knight, "I cannot wait;
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So on he rode, in his armour bright,
His sword all keen for the longed-for fight.
"Langh with us, laugh," cried the merry crowd,
"Oh, weep!" wailed the others, with sorrow bowed.
"Help us!" the weak and weary prayed;
But for joy, nor grief, nor heed he stayed.
And the years rolled on, and his eyes grew dim,
And he died—and none made moan for him.

He missed the good that he might have done,
He missed the blessings he might have won,
Seeking some glorious task to find,
His eyes to all humbler work were blind.
He that is faithful in that which is least
Is bidden to sit at the heavenly feast.
Yet men and women lament their fate
If they be not called to do something great.

GONG THIRTEEN.—There is a duty of 25 per cent. on clothing imported into South Africa. One reason why you did not get the information at the Inland Revenue Office was because they had not got it to give.

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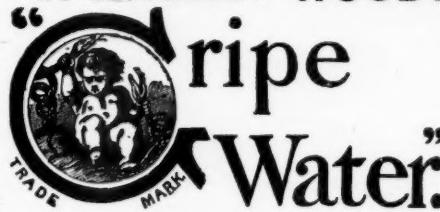
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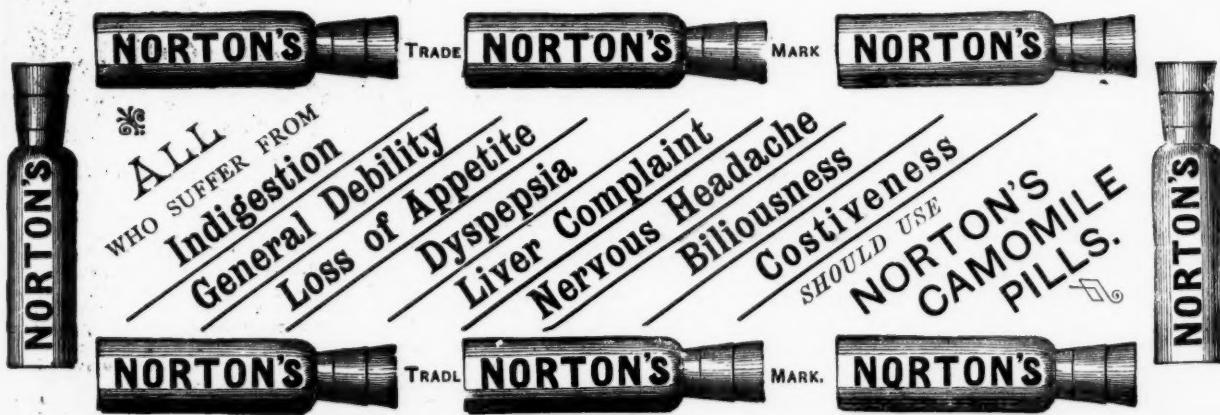
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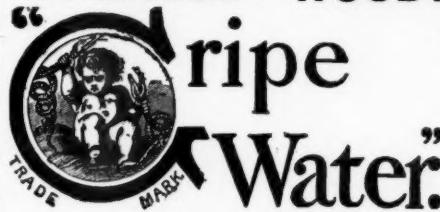
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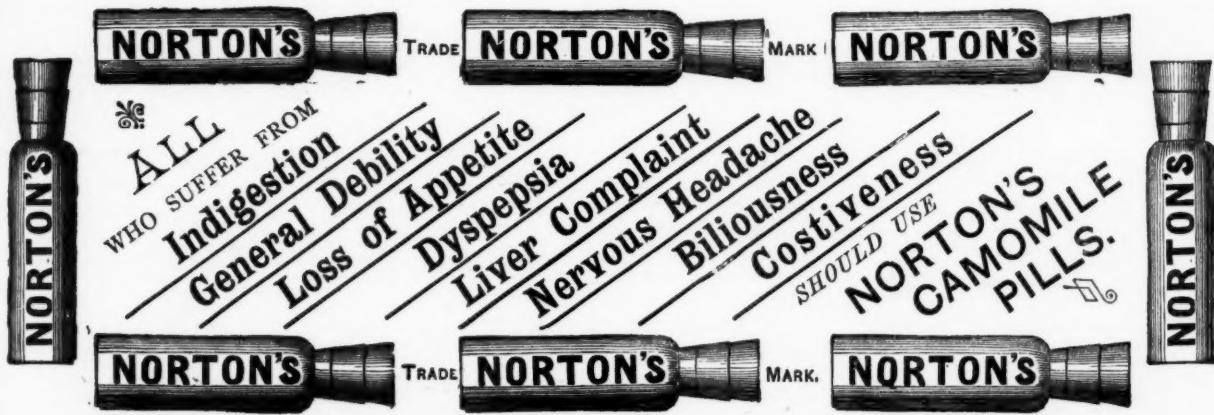
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